

A GREAT PHYSICIAN AND BIBLIOPHILE¹

THESE volumes stretch to 1,440 pages, but from first to last they are crowded with living interest. A great physician is brought into 'proper alignment with that most remarkable period in the annals of medicine through which he lived, and of which he was part.' His letters are freely used to show his rare personality, spirit, and character, and make the man stand out vividly before our eyes. The work, written by a distinguished American surgeon, is fitly dedicated 'To Medical Students, in the hope that something of Osler's spirit may be conveyed to those of a generation that has not known him; and particularly to those in America, lest it be forgotten who it was that made it possible for them to work at the bedside in the wards.'

He was born on July 12, 1849, in his father's parsonage at Bond Head, to the north-west of Lake Ontario. The Oslers were Cornish merchants and shipowners settled in Falmouth. In 1837 Featherstone Lake Osler, who had served for some years in the Royal Navy, and then entered St. Catherine's Hall, Cambridge, as Mathematical Scholar, went out with his bride, Ellen Free Pickton, as a missionary clergyman to Canada. The bride was born in London but adopted by an uncle in Falmouth, and among the goods taken to Canada by the young folk was a tin box of home-made Cornish gingerbread. They had their full share of settlers' hardships. For some time they lived in a hut where cattle had been kept, their clothing and trunks being stored in a barn three-quarters of a mile off. No living creatures save wolves were within a third of a mile from them. The young wife went to Newmarket for the birth of her first son, whilst the husband lived in the hut, chinking up its holes with snow and cooking his own food.

¹ *The Life of Sir William Osler.* By HARVEY CUSHING. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925.)

There the desire to serve is made the motive of the longing for holiness. It is when the needs of the world become most urgent that we grow most conscious of our own unfitness. Most of us, as we grow older in the tasks of this ministry, are driven back more and more to God. If He cannot make us fit, we shall never be. And so we pray with more earnestness than in the days of our youth :

Give me a new, a perfect heart,
From doubt, and fear, and sorrow free ;
The mind which was in Christ impart,
And let my spirit cleave to Thee.

Let us take courage. Ours is a goodly heritage as Methodist ministers. If I have seemed sometimes to criticize Wesley, I hope I may be pardoned, first because, as all his readers know, he was always criticizing himself ; and secondly, because I believe, with all my heart, that this great master of the Christian life was profoundly right in his teaching that we are meant to live in constant happy fellowship with God, with the mind that was in Christ Jesus within us.

We have not yet forgotten how to sing, and we hope we never shall, that most beautiful of all the hymns for Believers seeking for Full Redemption :

Lord, I believe a rest remains
To all Thy people known,
A rest where pure enjoyment reigns,
And Thou art loved alone :

A rest, where all our soul's desire
Is fixed on things above ;
Where fear, and sin, and grief expire,
Cast out by perfect love.

WILFRID J. MOULTON.

The future Regius Professor of Medicine was the youngest son in a family of nine. He was born on the Orangeman's fête-day, when a lively company used to follow their cockaded leader on his white horse to the parsonage, where speeches were made and felicitations offered in return. They insisted that the new-comer, who was brought out to them in his father's arms, should be named William, and dubbed him the 'young Prince of Orange.' As each anniversary came round he was decked out in appropriate colours, with a broad sash of orange and blue, and brought out on the parsonage verandah to greet the procession which the other children came to regard as arranged in his honour. It was an old-fashioned household, with strict regulations and early morning prayers. Fifty years later Sir William said: 'The most vivid recollections of my boyhood in Canada cluster about the happy spring days when we went off to the bush to make maple sugar—the bright sunny days, the delicious cold nights, the camp-fires, the log cabins, and the fascinating work tapping the trees, putting on the birch-bark spouts, arranging the troughs, and then going from tree to tree, collecting in pails the clear, sweet sap.'

In 1857 Canon Osler became Rector of Dundas, which seemed likely to become the chief city at the western end of Lake Ontario. Willie was already an expert in practical jokes, and for one of these he and his four accomplices were expelled from the local grammar school. He was then sent to the boarding school at Barrie, where his elder brothers had been educated. He was the top boy, notably proficient in Bible knowledge, and foremost in all sports. In his next school he found a master who loved Nature, and was able to get boys interested in it. This was the Rev. W. A. Johnson, whose father had been Wellington's aide-de-camp in India and had settled at Down House, where Darwin afterwards lived. The son began a school for the education of his three boys, and when it prospered he transferred it to Trinity University, Toronto, and himself served as warden and

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assistant master. Osler became head prefect. It was a rare delight to him to find in Johnson a man who knew the names of the stars, could tell about the frog-spawn and the caddis-worms, read Gilbert White and Kingsley's *Glaucus* to the boys in the evening, and show them the wonders of the microscope. A field day hunting fossils was a joy to be remembered.

In 1867 he went to Trinity College, Toronto, with a Dixon Prize Scholarship. Johnson's friend, Dr. Bovell, who was in practice in the city and held the Chair of Natural Theology at Trinity, exerted a deep and enduring influence over Osler. He had been intended for the Church, but in his second year at Trinity determined to study medicine. At Toronto he laid his foundations. The corner-stone was work, and the finding of this a pleasure. To this were added what he afterwards called the Art of Detachment, the Virtue of Method, the Quality of Thoroughness, and the Grace of Humility. He began clinical work in 1870 at the McGill Medical School in Montreal, where the hospital advantages were greater than at Toronto. It followed the methods in vogue at Edinburgh, and was closely affiliated to the General Hospital, where students had a degree of freedom in the wards such as no other large American hospital offered. Osler made his mark as the most promising student of his year. When he was worried about his final examination and what he should do afterwards, he picked up a volume of Carlyle and read, 'Our main business is not to see what lies dimly at a distance, but to do what lies clearly at hand.' That he regarded as one of two trifling incidents by which his life had been influenced. It was the conscious starting-point of a habit that enabled him to utilize to the full the single talent with which he often said he had been entrusted. Thirty years later he wrote, 'I do believe that if I have had any measure of success at all, it has been solely because of doing the day's work that was before me just as faithfully and honestly and energetically as was in my power.' It was

probably at this early period that he began his life-long habit of a half-hour's reading in bed before he put out his light. That gave him his familiarity with general literature and his bibliographical tastes.

In Dr. Palmer Howard he found an ideal student-teacher, who inoculated Osler with his interest in morbid anatomy and the problem of tuberculosis. He won a special prize for his thesis, which was 'greatly distinguished for originality and research, and was accompanied by thirty-three microscopic and other preparations of morbid structure, kindly presented by the author to the museum of the Faculty.' After taking his diploma, he came to England and spent seventeen months at University College Hospital, in the laboratory of John Burdon Sanderson, whom he succeeded as Regius Professor thirty-four years later. He discovered blood platelets in circulating blood, and Sanderson presented the observations to the Royal Society. The discovery made his old teacher, Professor Howard, wish that someone would found a Chair of Physiological and Pathological Histology at McGill, and that Osler might fill it. Three months in Berlin and five months in Vienna further enriched his experience.

In 1874 he was appointed Lecturer on the Institutes of Medicine at McGill. Next year he became Professor. He volunteered to do the autopsies, and the visiting surgeons and physicians at the General Hospital came to rely upon him for this service. His income was small, and he often had to borrow from Dr. Howard to meet the day's expenses. 'I suffered at that time,' he said, 'from an acute attack of chronic impecuniosity.' He offered to take charge of the small-pox ward, and used his fee for this dangerous task to provide twelve microscopes for his class of students. He caught the disease in a mild form himself, though he was repeatedly vaccinated. He never had a successful 'take,' and often quoted his own case to illustrate the fallacy of the 'non-take' belief as an evidence of immunity which prevailed at the time.

He took an active share in reviving the old Medico-Chirurgical Society, and there was hardly a meeting in which he did not take part. The clinical papers, written by others, were usually supplemented by a pathological note from his pen, which often constituted the only original feature. 'It was a new thing for the profession to have a histological pathologist in their midst. Easily enthused himself by every novel condition, he infected all others with whom he came in contact with something of the same spirit; and as he worked for work's sake alone, and cared more for giving others credit than for what he might gain, his reputation spread widely, and soon went beyond his own community.'

His appointment as pathologist to the General Hospital enabled him to lay the foundation of his subsequent brilliant career as a clinician. For thirteen years he carried on his work. He had seen its importance under Virchow in Berlin, 'and his familiarity with the microscope, unusual for the time, made him easily excel his fellows in modern methods, permitting the minute study of the processes of disease. But aside from all this, he felt the same profound fascination that had kept Bichat, Laennec, and many other brilliant and industrious young men for years at the autopsy-table.' His industry became proverbial, though he could scarcely have realized that a long apprenticeship in the pathological laboratory always will be the only way for surgeon or physician to reach the very top of the profession. Osler's cheerfulness and equanimity were surprising, and he never lost an opportunity of saying a word of cheerful encouragement to those who worked with him. His demands on their help were unlimited, but this was more than repaid by the opportunities and good fellowship that he gave them. He sometimes saw patients in consultation with other doctors, but had no wish for private practice, and was amply satisfied for the time with his college income, modest though it was. The chief articles of diet that he loved were currant dumplings and an old-fashioned suet pudding, on the appearance of

which he invariably burst into a Gregorian chant of exultation, keeping as nearly on the key as his unmusical ear permitted.

When he entered the hospital wards as a physician in 1878, the older doctors were rather afraid of his belief that over-treatment with drugs was one of the medical errors of the day, and that the natural tendency of disease was toward recovery, provided that the patient was decently cared for, properly nursed, and not over-dosed. He turned his ward from a sick-room into a bright, cheerful place. Very little medicine was given. 'To the astonishment of every one, the chronic beds, instead of being emptied by disaster, were emptied rapidly through recovery; under his stimulating and encouraging influence the old cases nearly all disappeared; the new cases stayed but a short time. The revolution was wonderful. It was one of the most forceful lessons in treatment that had ever been demonstrated.'

He was able to spend the summer of 1884 in Europe. At Berlin the central figure was Virchow, to whose lectures he listened with eager interest. At Leipzig he entered with enthusiasm into the study of bacteriology. Whilst in Leipzig he was offered the Senior Chair of Medicine in the University of Pennsylvania. McGill thus lost its 'potent ferment.' He could 'easily have become a great scientist, but he chose the path which led to the formation of the great clinician which he became; a worthy associate of the great men who have made English medicine famous.'

Philadelphia students were rather taken aback when the new professor appeared. His predecessor had given brilliant lectures; Osler was halting in speech, and, as likely as not, sat on the edge of the table swinging his feet and twisting his ear. He did not arrive in a carriage, but jumped from the street-car, carrying a small black satchel containing his lunch, and a bundle of books and papers under his arm. He insisted on having actual examples of the disease to

illustrate his lectures, and gave careful bedside instruction to the students in the wards.

Almost within a month of his arrival he had rigged up a small clinical laboratory, and quickly produced an atmosphere so encouraging and helpful that young fellows trooped to his side. It was a striking contrast to the graceful generalizations concerning disease, delivered from a platform, to which the elder students had been accustomed. One of them compared it to 'a breath of fresh air let into a stifling room.' He declined to become a practitioner, and limited himself to consultations. After a morning in the University Hospital and some bread-and-milk picked up in the wards, he would be found in the afternoon with a group of students, making post-mortem examinations. His reputation as a consultant was spreading, and his visits to patients were invariably a solace to them and to their doctors. One of these patients was Walt Whitman, then in his sixty-fifth year. He went to see him at the request of Dr. Maurice Bucke, who had found in *Leaves of Grass* 'spiritual enlightenment, a new power in life, new joys in a new existence on a plane higher than he had ever hoped to reach.' Osler was struck with the poet's appearance, but could not share Dr. Bucke's enthusiasm for his poetry, though he gradually came to realize what his life and message meant to his followers. Osler was now studying malaria, and his power of 'inseminating other minds' led many of his pupils and assistants to concentrate on the subject.

After five years in Philadelphia he was appointed physician-in-chief to the John Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, which was formally opened in 1889. He got to work with his accustomed zest, and inspired all around him with his own zeal. There was no immediate prospect of starting the Medical School, and, as the hospital staff was well organized, Osler was able to enjoy one of his 'quinquennial brain-dustings' in Europe. The chief task of 1891 was *The Principles and Practice of Medicine*, which appeared in 1893,

and had such sureness of touch, and put facts in such a readable way, that it 'immediately superseded all other text-books of general medicine, and still continues to hold the field.' A second printing was needed in two months; 23,000 copies were sold of the first edition, and the 100,000th copy was reached in 1905.

He married Mrs. Gross, the widow of an old friend, on May 8, 1892, and before the end of the month they were on their way to Southampton. They managed to enjoy a few weeks in London undiscovered; then their English friends found them and made much of them. No. 1 West Franklin Street, Baltimore, was their home for the next fourteen years. Osler's position, popularity, and literary ability led to frequent calls for public addresses, and, though he fretted at times under these interruptions, he found it hard to refuse an appeal. He felt it his duty also to attend the important medical gatherings, in which he became a distinguished figure.

Behind his quiet, serious manner there was a humour which would 'sally forth at the most unexpected times, without any relaxation of countenance or any change in tone or voice; indeed, people would sometimes take a remark which was entirely jocular *au grand sérieux*, and wonder that it should have been made by so sedate and learned a person.' He had a tender heart, though he had trained himself to disguise his emotions, and sometimes whistled, as Uncle Toby put it, 'Tis that I may not weep.' A lady who had been his patient says, 'In a room full of discordant elements he entered and saw only his patient, and only his patient's greatest need, and instantly the atmosphere was charged with kindly vitality, every one felt that the situation was under control, and all was attention. No circumlocution, no meandering. The moment Sir William gave you was yours. It was hardly ever more than a moment, but there was curiously no abrupt beginning or end to it.' Every physician felt safe in his hands, for he

knew that he could not have a better friend in the profession, and that if he had to change the treatment he would see that everything was set in order for the new method. He was a giver of life, and, 'under the surface of the gay man of the world, lived the saint.'

His son Revere, born on December 28, 1895, became the source of his greatest happiness, until his death in the Great War caused him his deepest sorrow. No child ever found father a better playmate. His days were crowded. He rose at seven, and went to bed between ten and eleven. At nine he was in hospital, with a group of students growing round him like a small avalanche. He took three mornings at home for work. Wherever he went, by rail or cab, book and pencil were in hand to note down every happy thought. In the wards and at the bedside he was at his best. Any poor soul with a chronic and hopeless malady always got his best. Medicine, he told his students, was learned at the bedside and not in the class-room. 'Observe, record, tabulate, communicate. Use your five senses. The art of the practice of medicine is to be learned only by experience; 'tis not an inheritance; it cannot be revealed.' On Saturday evenings he had his fourth-year group of clinical clerks at his house. Two were invited in turn for dinner at seven. At eight the rest came in. An hour was passed in discussion of the week's work, each being asked about his patients and his reading. Then over biscuits, cheese, and beer he would talk about a favourite author, illustrated by early editions of their work. He thus came to know the men individually and intimately.

His text-book was read by a member of Mr. Rockefeller's philanthropic staff, and led to the Rockefeller Institute of Medical Research. In 1900 he was invited to the Chair of Medicine at Edinburgh, but feeling was so strong at Baltimore that he withdrew his consent to stand, though he confessed that he would rather hold a Chair in Edinburgh than in any School in the English-speaking world. He was

coming to be the doctor's doctor at Baltimore, and was pushed to the limit with consultations. He made a bold attack on the city for its utter lack of attention to the needs of its 10,000 consumptives, and roused the citizens to action, with the best results. Every year his influence became greater, and when he was offered the Regius Professorship of Medicine at Oxford in 1905 his acceptance was an act of preservation. 'For the daily grind of a consulting practice into which he had become drawn was growing worse from year to year, with less and less time for teaching and clinical work.' In a valedictory address at Baltimore he said, 'The teacher's life should have three periods—study until twenty-five, investigation until forty, profession until sixty, at which age I would have him retired on a double allowance. Whether Anthony 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.' Next morning the papers had a headline, 'Osler recommends chloroform at sixty,' and for days and weeks a storm of discussion, and even of abuse, raged. One morning, when the temperature was high, Mrs. Osler said to a friend, 'I am escorting the shattered idol home from Church.' His joking allusion had been intended to lighten the sadness of parting from old friends, and, though he was sorely hurt by the outbreak, he went on his way with a smile.

Oxford soon took Osler to its heart. He was matriculated at Christ Church, and after half an hour as an undergraduate had the Oxford M.D. conferred upon him. There was hardly a post without an invitation to dinner, and Mrs. Osler noted, 'I have now 113 visits to return.' He made a close friendship with the Cambridge Regius, Sir Clifford Allbutt. It is said that, as they entered a reception in London arm in arm, Osler murmured into the ear of the usher, who announced in a stentorian voice, 'The Brothers Regii!' as they advanced together and made a stage bow. Osler wrote on July 1, 'I am getting rested. Outlook for a peaceful life

most attractive.' He was sitting to Sargent for a group of old colleagues, and found him most interesting to talk to. The Oslers had taken Mrs. Max Müller's house, 7 Norham Gardens, furnished, but in 1907 they got a home of their own at 13 Norham Gardens. He was in great demand for medical functions, but nothing gave him more pleasure than his official position as a Curator of the Bodleian Library and his election as a perpetual Delegate of the University Press. It was soon discovered that 'his spirit was free, alert, vivacious, and that there was apparently no end to the span of his interests or to the vivid, life-giving energy which he was prepared to throw into any task which fell to him to discharge. Old and young alike acknowledged his mastery, and never left his presence without feeling the magnetism of the man, and that insatiable but unobtrusive appetite for helpfulness which made him the prince of friends and benefactors.' Mr. Falconer Madan, then Bodley's Librarian, says he was enthusiastic for anything that would increase the efficiency of the library. 'If he bought a remarkable book he would bring it for us to see; if he heard of a new publication or a collection of manuscripts he would come and tell us; if he had a distinguished visitor he would bring him to the library and introduce him; if any of the staff were ill he would go and visit them.'

As Regius Professor he was Master of the almshouses at Ewelme, and was fascinated with the beauty of the place. He knew the pains and aches of the thirteen aged men, and was adored by the villagers, among whom he played the part of antiquarian, physician, country gentleman, and lover of nature, enjoying everything and enjoyed by all. An old safe in one of the rooms defied all attempts to open it till a workman came down from Chubb's. Then it yielded an amazing collection of title deeds, court rolls, and conveyances of the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries. They had to be spread out in the graveyard to dry, and were then put in order and bound by one of the Bodleian experts. The

Regius Professor was moving about all over the country. He told the Working Men's College in Camden Town: 'Throw all the beer and spirits into the Irish Channel, the English Channel, and the North Sea for a year, and people in England would be infinitely better. It would certainly solve all the problems with which the philanthropists, the physicians, and the politicians have to deal. Do you suppose you need tobacco? On the day after you had dumped all the tobacco into the sea you would find that it was very good for you, and hard on the fishes.'

He shared the family rejoicing over his mother's hundredth birthday in 1906. She told of having walked from Hampstead to Bushy Park to carry news of the Battle of Waterloo, and before they went out to Canada she learned how to patch boots. The birthday cake with a hundred candles was carried to her room by two men, and represented the five sovereigns she had lived under. She had six living children, twenty-six grandchildren, and twenty-one great-grandchildren. She passed peacefully away three months later.

The Osler's house in Oxford came to be known as 'The Open Arms,' through which streamed a constant succession of old friends and celebrities. Rudyard Kipling stayed there for the *Encaenia*—'such a jolly fellow, so full of fun, and with an extraordinary interest in everything.' It was delightful to hear him and Mark Twain joking together. Osler himself delighted to be among children, and was eagerly welcomed in their nurseries as a playmate.

Dr. Cushing feels that Osler's greatest professional service was that of a propagandist of public health measures. In Montreal and Baltimore he was constantly crusading against malaria and typhoid. He took his part also in the fight with consumption. No man came into closer touch with workers in all fields of medicine. He was made a baronet in 1911. 'I think I'll have to accept,' he told his wife. 'Canada will be so pleased—there's only one Canadian baronet.' His son gave him constant delight. 'He will never be a student,

but he has good hands and a good heart—two out of three essentials—so we are satisfied.’ The boy was an ardent fisherman, and gradually came to share his father’s interest in good literature. He took also to sketching. When war broke out he was at Christ Church, and joined the Oxford Training Corps. His father said he was not much set on military life. ‘Literature, books, and art. He and I are so congenial mentally. It is delightful to have him to take to these things spontaneously.’ He did good service with the Canadian Military Hospital, but in March, 1916, he felt that he must join the field artillery. In August, 1917, he was killed by a shell which burst unexpectedly as they were bridging over a shell-hole and killed or wounded eight out of twenty in the company. Lady Astor tells how Osler went to the hospital at Taplow, where he ‘really brought Healing and Health, Life not Death.’ He was there ‘in less than a week after he got the news which I feel really killed him. The men saw what had happened, and we all knew his heart was broken. He went through the wards in the same gay old way, but when he got to the house—for luncheon alone with me—he sobbed like a child. It was so hard for us who loved him.’

He kept bravely to his work, and found relief in perfecting his collection of medical books. He was asked to represent the University in Parliament, but was faithful to the advice he gave to young doctors to shun politics as they would shun drink and speculation. ‘As a right-living, clear-thinking citizen, with all the interests of the community at heart, the doctor exercises the best possible sort of social and political influence.’ His interest in the Bodleian and the Clarendon Press brought him constant pleasure, and his election to ‘Dr. Johnson’s Club’ gave him a happy thrill. He was chosen President of the Classical Association, and his address on ‘The Old Humanities and the New Science’ was ‘full of learning, of humour, of feeling, of eloquence.’ Sir F. Kenyon says, ‘Osler himself was a wellnigh perfect example

of the union of science and the humanities, which to some of us is the ideal of educational progress; and his address embodied the whole spirit of his ideal.' Book catalogues and auction lists went with him everywhere. On the flyleaf of one he scribbled in pencil the account of 'a record day at Sotheby's'. He had a rare nose for books, and could track to its lair everything that lurked in them'. His last note to a colleague at the Bodleian says: 'Abed, coughing, comfortable, hopeful! Appetite good and plenty of books - which are the essentials of life'.

His seventieth birthday brought an outburst of affection from both sides of the Atlantic. His house was nearly swamped with letters, telegrams, and cables from old and young, both within and without the profession. This was in July, 1919. In October he was confined to bed with his old enemy bronchitis; but this did not check his flashes of fun, though his nurse is quite sure that he knew from the first that his illness would prove fatal. On Christmas Eve he asked to have Milton's 'Nativity' read from his precious first edition, as he had been accustomed to read it to Revere on Christmas Eve. He could only bear to hear a few stanzas. He died quietly and without pain on December 29. Years before he had protested against the pictures given of the act of dying. 'Nowadays, when the voice of Fate calls, the majority of men may repeat the last words of Socrates. "I owe a cock to Asclepius" - a debt of thankfulness, as was us, for a fair and easy passage'. He had many honours, but the proudest of all was his unwritten title, 'The Young Man's Friend'. 'He enjoyed with the joys and wept with the sorrows of the humblest of those who were proud to be his pupils. He stooped to lift them up to the place of his royal friendship, and the magic touch of his generous personality helped many a desponder in the rugged paths of life'.