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Osler all the
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THE REV. CANON JARVIS TO DR. ARTHUR JUKES JOHNSON

8 Sussex Ave., Toronto.
Tuesday, Jan. 4, 1921.

My dear Johnson:

You asked me last evening to give you some memoranda which might be of service to the compiler of Sir Wm. Osler's biography. You will remember that he came to us at Weston from the old Barrie School which in those days had the reputation of turning out pretty strong men, well grounded in the 'humanities', who before they were turned out were rather precociously sophisticated in ways not becoming a boy, & not adding to his good repute even when he came to man's estate. Whether Osler was greatly imbued with this spirit need not be discussed. Anyhow I know that the moment he came under the influence of your good father, he was, like the rest of us, strongly impressed by him. He had a wonderful way of making boys see the greatness of Goodness, and infusing the moral courage to seek after it without making themselves pious prigs, or self conscious sanctimonstrocities.

It was your father, too, who started Osler on his scientific career, or at all events began the development of that taste for natural science which earned him a place amongst the greatest men of his time. ~~xxx~~ ~~xxx~~ was our greatest treat when 'Old Johnson' could be led to take a squad out for a field day, hunting fossils, and he did not need much persuasion. I can still see the Warden wielding an old prospector's pick ~~(I wonder if it is still in existence - it should be preserved)~~ and ^{also} the most eager boy of the lot to secure ~~the most~~ perfect *orthocerafite*, or whatever Lower Silurian relic the soft stone about Weston might yield. Some of us were keen to retrieve a few good sections of

orthoceras to be diligently polished and converted into prodigious sleeve links at 'Kent's store' in Yonge St. (~~wasn't it Kent's?~~)

Osler however was the scientist of the expedition. To him was entrusted the delicate work of grinding down and mounting specimens for microscope slides. ~~Is it the same microscope of which you spoke last evening?~~ Sometimes he might graciously, after the manner of ^{Don} Bob Sawyer, delegate some of this protracted mechanical grinding on the Water-of-Ayre stone to our less skilled hands - it wasn't every day that a boy had a chance to help in the construction of valuable scientific exhibits! - Nevertheless experts pronounced them exceptionally fine - after Osler had put the finishing touches.

Osler did not strike one as being an exceptionally brilliant scholar. His work was always done, and well done; but it was 'work', not a flash of inspiration, that brought results. It was no uncommon thing to see him during 'prep.', sitting with his fingers in his ears struggling with some problem, and oblivious of the distractions to which the rest of us had yielded, in despair of overcoming the difficulty, trusting Micawber-like, for something to turn up for our relief. And, nine cases out of ten, he would prove the deus ex machina, and we would reap the benefit of his wrestling with the (to us) unknowable. - We were ready to confess that we "hadn't any more brains than the Lord had given us."

Physically ~~he~~^{only} was rather undersized but extremely wiry and well proportioned, a fine all-round athlete, without being a champion in any particular line. I believe though, he did break the record for throwing the cricket ball at one of our term-end sports. Unfortunately, however, the Campus (if we may use a word I don't like, which our College athletes have

cf. Walker
account for
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today taken over from the Yankee vocabulary) proved too restricted for his prowess, and the ball hit the high fence near the top. Such a throw was never dreamed of. But Professor Jones of Trinity, possibly not an unprejudiced referee, came to the rescue, and by the aid of most compelling mathematical calculations - no doubt they were absolutely accurate as became the dictum of an exact science - demonstrated to our entire satisfaction that if that wretched fence had not been in the way, the ball would have hit the sod at a distance that neither Rugby nor Eton had ever achieved. Anyhow, it is not on record that our English schools yielded their claim to the championship on the strength of Professor Jones' verdict.

Once we played the villages a football match. This was in the days before "Rugby" and "Soccer" were recognized as 'exact sciences.' It was just primitive rough-and-tumble, and our light weights stood no chance pitted against the burly oafs that lined up against us. One huge bully threw himself ferociously and quite unnecessarily upon a little chap who could hardly be said to have been actually in the scrim; but Osler, who was, catapulted out of the vortex, and with one blow on the big fellow's jaw sent him to the ground and thence to bed for a week - and Osler was not so very much bigger than the little fellow he had avenged. * * *

Osler had a bad attack of Typhoid or pneumonia during one of the long vacations. Whether he afterwards fully recovered his vigor I do not know.

In 1867 he matriculated at Trinity and I think it was his intention to read for Holy Orders. He had a violent quarrel with the Provost not long after he came into residence. I never knew the rights or wrongs of it and

have forgotten what it was about. However, he felt that he had no 'vocation' and declared for Medicine - taking the lectures at the Toronto School and afterwards at McGill. After this I did not come into personal contact with him for many years. We occasionally corresponded. Later on, he sent me a copy of his thesis which first brought him fame. It was all Greek to me, and I have forgotten even its title - something about blood corpuscles and things. After he joined the Staff at Johns Hopkins I consulted him by correspondence in regard to a sick child of mine suffering from some mysterious ailment which puzzled the best physicians we could summon. Though unable to do much for us without a sight of the patient, he took infinite pains to give what comfort he could when we stood so much in need of help in those trying circumstances.

It was said that he in accepting Darwin had become violently agnostic. I doubt this very much. We all know how impulsive he was, and how his humorous flights were often taken too seriously by matter-of-fact critics. But judging from his remarks upon a book which I asked him to read, I am inclined to think that Tennyson might have such a one as he in his mind when he wrote the hackneyed distich -

"There is more faith in honest doubt &c"

I never saw the following anecdote in print but no doubt you have heard it. It was told me as an illustration of his quickness at repartee.

When lecturing at McGill, the subject of evolution came up incidentally, and a smart-Aleck wanted to know whether in view of the universal operation for appendicitis we might not expect Nature assisted by surgery presently to

evolute a race of super men happily relieved of the useless appendix.

Osler looked at him quizzically, and replied: "quite possibly - at the same time I must remind you that -

"There is a divinity that shapes our ends
Rough-hew them how we will" -

Darling reminded me on our way home last night of another instance of Osler's proficiency at throwing at a mark. The boys of "Johnson's house" had to come over for class work to the temporary school-rooms near the station.

The tedium of the return journey along the railway track was generally beguiled by some kind of game or contest such as school-boys are wont to invent for such occasions. One afternoon the stunt was to hit every telegraph pole on either side of the right-of-way by throwing pebbles at it from the track. Osler made a bet that he could do it if allowed a second try in the event of a failure at the first attempt in any one case; and he won his bet, having to fire twice at only half a dozen of the targets.



*** I thought I could recall a full assortment of incidents that might help to bring out an adequate idea of Osler's school days; but when one comes to put down one's impressions we begin to realize how vague and intangible they become as the years go by. I am afraid my effort is what the old Provost used to describe (speaking of our examination papers) as "regrettably jejune." But the outstanding impression left in my memory is that of a clean, straightforward, fearless and unassuming fellow, whose influence for good made itself felt in the general tone of the school - an admirable prefect compelling the respect and affection of the boys and worthy of the confidence placed in him by the masters.

But withal, full of fun and not so painfully impeccable as to discourage or disgust these who looked to him to give them a lead. He had to write his "impositions" sometimes, and did them with a good grace.