

OSLER LIBRARY NEWSLETTER

McGILL UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL, CANADA

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THIS IS THE FIRST issue of an occasional newsletter to the many friends (and relations, almost!) of the Osler Library. Through it, we hope to pass along some of our experiences and share with you the pleasures of some of the gifts we have received.

Perhaps you haven't visited the Library since it was moved in 1965. We would refer you to a recent article, "The Osler Library," by Charles G. Roland, M.D., in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (200: 865-870, June 5, 1967). This gives a succinct, illustrated account of the Library's life from its beginnings to 1967.

1969 is the fortieth anniversary of the establishment of the Osler Library which came to McGill in 1929. It is also the fortieth anniversary of the publication of the *Bibliotheca Osleriana*. After being out of print and unavailable for so long, the McGill University Press is reprinting the *Bibliotheca* this year. The proceeds will become part of the Lady Osler Endowment which supports many of the Library's programmes.

Miss Cécile Desbarats retired after 26 years of generous and well-remembered service in May, 1968. When she joined the Osler Library in 1942, she and Dr. W.W. Francis constituted the entire staff. When she retired, the collection had grown from some 9,000 volumes in 1942 to 22,000 items, the staff had enlarged to six, and the Department of the History of Medicine had come into existence. Miss Desbarats' successor as Associate Osler Librarian is Miss Ellen B. Wells, formerly of the History of Medicine Division of the National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, Md.

The historiated initial letter used on this page is reproduced from the *Myotomia Reformata* of William Cowper (1666-1709), published in London, 1724, (*Bibliotheca* no. 2384).

PRINTING AND THE MIND OF MAN

In the summer of 1963, a monumental exhibition, "... to illustrate the history of western civilization and the means of the multiplication of literary texts since the XV century ..." was assembled at the British Museum, and at Earls Court, London, under the above title. 849 items, including printed materials and the equipment for printing, were shown, and listed in the catalogue of the exhibit, which caused considerable controversy (including voluminous and sometimes acrimonious correspondence in the *London Times*), mostly over some of the items chosen to represent western civilization. The "questionable" items on exhibit included Carroll's *Adventures of Alice in Wonderland* (1865) and Carlyle's *The French Revolution* (1837). Of the 500-odd books in the exhibit, 57 were medical or related to the science of medicine, and included contributions of such men as Brunschwig, Vesalius, Harvey, Hooke, Morgagni, Schwann, Pasteur, Pavlov, and Fleming. "Questionable" items in this category were Franz Anton Mesmer and Mary Baker Eddy.

We were interested to see how the Osler Library stood in its holdings of these 57 items, and found that it has 28 titles in the same editions as the exhibit used, and 13 more in other early editions. The Medical Library had 2 more in each category. Finally, 5 more were present in modern facsimile or reprint editions in the Osler Library, making an impressive total of 50 available-out of 57. Of the remaining 7, we have 6 in English or French translations. The only title not yet represented in the Osler Library's catalogue is Mrs. Eddy's *Science and Health*, 1875.

GIFTS

In 1788, the first Act to regulate the practice of medicine in Canada under British rule was passed. It prohibited "whomsoever from practising medicine and surgery in the Province of Quebec, or the profession of accoucheur in the cities of Quebec or Montreal without permission." In 1831, this Act was repealed, and replaced by a new Act, to provide more effective regulations covering the practice of medicine ("physic"), surgery, and midwifery, as well as pharmacy.

The Osler Library was pleased to receive from Mr. Elliott Frosst, of Montreal, a two-page parchment document (complete with 4" wide wax seal) relating to the Act of 1831. It is *Letters patent appointing commissioners for examining and approving persons desirous of obtaining a license to practice physic and surgery in the district of Montreal*, dated January 18, 1831. The appointees named were William Robertson, William Caldwell, John Stephenson, and Andrew F. Holmes, all of whom received their medical training at the University of Edinburgh, and all members of the fledging Medical Faculty of McGill.

The Library is pleased to record that in the autumn, Dr. George A. Sherman, of East Lansing, Michigan, gave \$200.00 to the Library.

At the May 1, 1968 Board of Curators meeting, Dr. Samuel X. Radbill, of Philadelphia, presented the Osler Library with a commemorative bronze medal issued in 1967 on the centennial of the birth of R. Tait McKenzie. The obverse of the medal shows a profile bust of McKenzie, and the reverse bears one of his most famous works: *The Olympic Shield of Athletic Sports*. The designer and sculptor of the medal was J.R. Sinnock, and it was struck by the Medallic Art Company of New York City.

Among the assistants in the laboratory of Ivan Pavlov, from 1915-1922, was Boris Petrovich Babkin (1877-1950). Dr. Babkin was expelled from Russia in 1922 for political reasons, and after working with Sir Ernest Starling at University College, London, and then at Dalhousie University, he spent the rest of his professional life at McGill, as Professor of Physiology from 1928-1942.

Last fall, the Library received from Dr. G.K. Wlodek, of the McGill Department of Experimental Surgery, a large collection of Dr. Babkin's lecture notes and about 2200 reprints. All the lecture notes, and other manuscript materials were kept, as well as selected reprints, including over 150 items from Russian medical journals, from 1902-1937.

Among his lecture notes was one page, on the meaning of science for the medical profession, partially quoted here:

"... Science is eternal. There are no forces in the world which can destroy it. If you are an adept of science, if you believe in it, you can more easily live through personal and social troubles of the life. These words are not a rhetoric. From my own experience I know what a major power has the science. During the revolution I used to work in the laboratory more than usually. Almost twenty doctors were working with me. My friends used to call me crazy, but only by this crazy work I saved myself and helped too my comrades. There is a good German sentence: Geld verlieren nichts verlieren (To lose money nothing to lose), Ehre verlieren viel verlieren (To lose honour lose very much), Muth verlieren alles verlieren (To lose courage — lose everything)."

THE OSLER SOCIETY

The Osler Society, under its president, Bob Lewandowski, M.D. '69, met regularly throughout the school year in the W.W. Francis Seminar Room of the Osler Library. Papers were presented on a variety of topics, some relating to various aspects of medical history, some recounting the medical experiences of members of the Society during summer travels. The W.W. Francis Prize, given by Dr. Harry Ballon to the member judged to have presented the best paper during the year, was awarded to Sandra Lee, M.D. '69, for her account of her summer experiences in a leper colony in India.

The forty-eighth annual Osler Society Banquet was held on April 11, 1969 in the Faculty Club. Dr. Louis Lasagna, a clinical pharmacologist at The Johns Hopkins University, was the guest speaker for the evening, choosing as his topic "Drugs, Doctors and the Public 1938-1969."

SIR WILLIAM OSLER COMMEMORATIVE STAMP

Did you notice the stamp on the envelope containing this Newsletter? It's a special commemorative honouring Sir William Osler and issued by the Canadian Post Office to mark the fiftieth anniversary of his death. We have timed the appearance of the first issue of our Osler Library Newsletter to coincide with the date of issue of the stamp, June 23rd.

LADY OSLER ENDOWMENT

When the Osler Library opened in 1929, it possessed not only Osler's collection but the financial support of an endowment from Lady Osler. For the first 25 years of its existence, the Library virtually lived on this endowment, except for a portion of the salaries of Dr. Francis and his assistants. Through the generosity of many friends, particularly the Osler family, the endowment has grown, reaching its present level of over \$85,000. In more recent times, institutions such as the Wellcome Trust, the Markle Foundation, and the McConnell Foundation, have all contributed funds for specific purposes and now the Library is also supported by the University, though general University library funds are always at a premium.

But the backbone of support is still our Lady Osler Endowment, providing, as it does, the uncommitted income for rare-book buying, special equipment and supplies, (such as equipment for the proper display of our print collection), and miscellaneous contingencies such as courses for the conservation and management of rare materials. Among the larger projects ahead is the furnishing of a small reading room-study area devoted exclusively to the use of rare books. Without our Endowment fund, such things simply cannot be undertaken.

Besides its role of service to the McGill University community, the Osler Library conceives its responsibilities on a national and an international scale so that it can live up fully to the potential which Sir William Osler's collection gave to it, as well as to the hopes which he had for it. In order to have the financial means and the freedom to do this, the Osler Library will continue to depend upon the growth of the Lady Osler Endowment. The proceeds from the *Bibliotheca Osleriana* reprint will help, but the continuing generosity of the Library's friends is our most vital support.