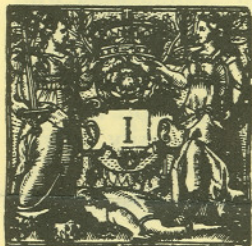


# OSLER LIBRARY NEWSLETTER

McGILL UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL, CANADA

No. 27 — FEBRUARY 1978

## SIR WILLIAM OSLER AND MABEL PUREFOY FITZGERALD



IN NOVEMBER 1973 the Osler Library received the following message from Mr. R. W. Hunt, Keeper of Western Manuscripts at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. "Among the papers of the late Miss Mabel Purefoy FitzGerald, of 12 Crick Road, Oxford, is a

box of letters from Sir William Osler. These letters are to be offered to the Osler Library of McGill University, in accordance with Miss FitzGerald's wishes." The offer was, of course, promptly accepted and shortly thereafter the letters arrived in Montreal. Written during the period 1905 to 1919, they cover a wide variety of subjects. Many concern books and pamphlets of historical interest. Miss FitzGerald was actively involved in searching for and acquiring items for Osler's library.\* He in turn kept her informed of books and pamphlets he had found and often presented her with volumes which he knew she would enjoy and treasure. Other letters relate to Miss FitzGerald's scientific career and Osler's attempts to help her in every possible way. Still others are of a purely personal nature. The letters are accompanied by Miss FitzGerald's explanatory notes. These notes, often quite extensive, are perhaps even more interesting than the letters. For example, one of Osler's letters occupies only three lines, merely giving her an appointment for the next day. To this Miss FitzGerald has appended almost a page and a half of notes, describing her meeting with Osler and its effects on her research.

The following account is based largely on these letters and explanatory notes, bequeathed to the Osler Library by Miss FitzGerald. Supplementary material has been generously supplied by Dr. A.H.T. Robb-Smith and Dr. R.W. Torrance of Oxford and useful information has been obtained from an article by Dr. D.B. Dill in *The Physiologist*.\*\* No attempt has been made to provide a complete description of Miss FitzGerald's full and varied life or an analysis of her scientific work. The chief purpose of this account is to throw light on her relationship with Osler.

Miss FitzGerald first met Osler on August 1st, 1905, a few months after his arrival in Oxford. She was then in her early 30's and already launched in a career as a physiologist. But, although launched, she was encountering difficulties due to her sex; prejudice against women in medicine and related fields was strong. She had studied

physiology at Oxford University under Professor Francis Gotch in the late 1890's when women were not officially admitted to such programs. She did well in her examinations but, being a woman, was not given a degree. Following this she embarked on a number of studies, including measurements of normal values of alveolar carbon dioxide pressure in adults and children at sea level. In this investigation she collaborated with Dr. John Scott Haldane. She wanted to extend her research to changes in alveolar carbon dioxide pressure in disease, but her sex and the relative novelty of such experimental work made it difficult for her to obtain permission to conduct measurements on patients in the Radcliffe Infirmary. However, as she herself has recorded, "the horizon brightened with the advent of Dr. Osler."

As already mentioned, her first meeting with Osler was on August 1st, 1905. Haldane had asked Osler if Miss FitzGerald could be given access to patients in the Radcliffe Infirmary. The request met with a ready response. Osler wrote Miss FitzGerald, "Could you meet me at the Radcliffe Infirmary tomorrow [August 1st] at 10:30 a.m. There is a very good case of Pernicious Anaemia which might do for your work." In her explanatory note, Miss FitzGerald wrote that it was on a beautiful summer day that the appointment was kept and that Osler was dressed to suit the heat of the day in white and a straw hat, "not as an orthodox Professor of Medicine about to visit the wards." The selected case was produced as promised. In the days which followed, Osler produced many other suitable cases and "everything was made easy" for her to carry out her research, both in the wards and with out-patients. This was not all. Osler arranged for her to undertake clinical laboratory work at the Radcliffe Infirmary and saw to it that she was invited to lectures, clinics, exhibits, medical society meetings, and hospital rounds. As their ways led together — Crick Road, where Miss FitzGerald lived, being the next parallel street to Norham Gardens — she often accompanied Dr. Osler to or from the Infirmary and afterwards was generally among the fortunate ones taken back to tea; a "book talk" frequently followed. Small wonder that she remarked that "the horizon brightened with the advent of Dr. Osler."

With Osler's encouragement, and no doubt with his influential help, Miss FitzGerald obtained a Rockefeller Travelling Fellowship and sailed for the United States in December 1907. Her notes mention a thoughtful act characteristic of the Oslers. She felt sad at leaving Oxford and her sadness was increased by having to spend Christmas in mid-Atlantic on the S.S. *Campania* with a violent

\*Miss FitzGerald continued adding to Osler's library after his death (see *Bibl. Osl.* 4369, 7697, 7697A, 7781).

\*\*D.B. Dill, "Mabel Purefoy FitzGerald: Our second centenarian," *The Physiologist*, 1973, 16: 247-248.

The historiated letter on this page is reproduced from *The Workes of Lucius Annaeus Seneca, both Morall and Naturall* . . . Translated by Tho. Lodge, D. in *Physicke*, London, 1614. *Bibl. Osl.* 5085.

storm raging. Lonely and very much under the weather, she was cheered by greetings and gifts from "Wm. Osler and G.R. Osler." These the Oslers had dispatched to the ship's doctor at Liverpool, charging him to deliver them on Christmas Day.

At the Rockefeller Institute in New York she worked with Noguchi in bacteriology and, whilst in North America, went to the University of Toronto to work for a few months with Professor A.B. Macallum on the secretion of gastric acid. Throughout this period in the United States and Canada, encouraging letters, containing news of Oxford, came to her regularly from Osler. In them he sent greetings to his many friends, greetings which when delivered must have greatly enlarged the circle of her own acquaintances and friends.

In May 1910 Miss FitzGerald came back to Oxford and Osler's invitations to all manner of medical events resumed. Then in 1911 she returned to the United States. During that year she made what was probably her most important scientific contribution, a study of blood haemoglobin concentrations and alveolar carbon dioxide pressures at high altitudes conducted when she was a member of an Anglo-American Expedition to Colorado.

With the outbreak of World War One in 1914, Miss FitzGerald wished to return to Great Britain and sought Osler's assistance. As always, his response was immediate and helpful but her lack of formal qualifications proved to be a handicap. Eventually she was offered the post of Clinical Pathologist to the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh; she was appointed in June 1915 and held this post for four years. The correspondence with Osler continued unabated, mainly about the acquisition of books and pamphlets for his library, until the autumn of 1919.

With Osler's death in December 1919 the story of this happy and fruitful association comes to a close but a postscript must be added. Miss FitzGerald lived on for

many years. After the end of World War One she did bacteriological work in Edinburgh and then around 1930 she returned to Oxford to look after the home in Crick Road where her sisters had continued to live. She rapidly disappeared from view as far as the medical and scientific worlds were concerned. This period of relative obscurity lasted for over forty years except for brief recognition of her past career during the J.S. Haldane Centenary Symposium held at Oxford in 1961. Then, eleven years later, on August 3rd, 1972 she celebrated her hundredth birthday with all the publicity that such an observance often entails. A newspaper account\* commenced with the following words — "An Oxford woman who is 100 today never got a degree, but she became the friend and colleague of some of the most eminent scientists of the early twentieth century." It was not long before her lack of a degree was corrected. Oxford University offered her an honorary Master of Arts. On December 14th, 1972 a special Congregation was held for her in Convocation House adjoining the Sheldonian Theatre, a ceremony described at the time as unique in Oxford's 800-year history\*\* and one which surely would have delighted Sir William Osler. At long last she became an Oxford graduate, a distinction she had earned but not received more than seventy years before.

In view of her advanced age it could hardly be expected that she would live much longer and death came on August 24th, 1973, three weeks after her 101st birthday. Thus she outlived Osler by more than half a century. Her care in preserving and assembling his letters with the addition of her own notes and her wish that they should come to the Osler Library showed that, throughout her long life, she remembered and valued that rewarding friendship of her earlier years.

\**The Oxford Mail*, August 3, 1972

\*\**The Oxford Mail*, December 14, 1972

E.H. Bensley



The FitzGerald sisters outside their home on Crick Road, Oxford. Mabel Purefoy FitzGerald is sitting on the bench at the right. Photograph taken in 1897 or 1898 and kindly supplied by Mabel's grand-nephew, Mr. Geoffrey Purefoy.

## A RECENT OSLER LIBRARY EXHIBIT

From October 1977 to January 1978 the Osler Library exhibit was devoted to the histories of the McGill Medical and Osler Libraries. The greater part of the exhibit displayed books, manuscripts, and photographs relating to the story of the Medical Library. This is the oldest library on the campus, having been established in 1823, and its priceless archives have recently been transferred to the Osler Library. The early nucleus of the Medical Library consisted of volumes from the private collections of the founders of the McGill Medical Faculty. Acquisitions bearing the signatures of three of the founders, Holmes, Robertson, and Stephenson, were shown, along with pictures of the men themselves. Of these Holmes was both first librarian and first Dean of the Medical Faculty. Another feature of this section of the exhibit was a framed collection of photographs of the librarians of the Medical Library from 1823 to 1967, prepared by Mrs. Margaret Farmer as the Canada Centennial Project of the Medical Library. The exhibit also included the only known extant copy of the first (and only) printed catalogue of the Medical Library (1845). An interesting Canadiana item from the Medical Library Archives was also shown: a "Tariff for the Different Cities Adopted by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of the Province of Quebec 27th September 1877". This list quotes a fee of \$25.00 for "Reduction of Hernia by Taxis."

The Osler Library history was illuminated with a glimpse of the original manuscript introduction by Sir William Osler to the catalogue of his library, the *Bibliotheca Osleriana*. A photograph of the library in his private home in Oxford was also shown, as well as a case full of "Treasures from the Osler Library": a copy of *La Henriade* inscribed by Voltaire to his physician, a 2,600-year-old clay tablet from Assyria, surgical instruments designed by Dr. Norman Bethune, an incunabula printed in 1477 featuring a miniature portrait of Saint Bonaventura, and a book weighing 28¼ pounds! Of the last, Dr. W.W. Francis, first Osler Librarian, has said: "I was in Oxford when this book arrived about 1918. Osler grumbled and groaned getting it out of the case and handed it to me with the remark, 'Jehoshaphat, take it up and weigh it.'"

\*W.W. Francis, *Showman's Patter*, Unpublished MS. 1950-57, p. 6.

Marilyn Fransiszyn  
Reference and Manuscripts Librarian  
Osler Library

Editorial Committee for the *Newsletter*: E.H. Bensley, Editor;  
Philip Teigen, Librarian; Karin Waterhouse, Editorial Assistant.

## A BIRTHDAY GIFT

In honour of Dr. Harold N. Segall's eightieth birthday last October, his family, friends, and colleagues presented to the Osler Library gifts totalling more than \$1500.

Dr. Segall became a member of the Board of Curators of the Osler Library in 1972 but his interest in Osler and the Osler Library goes back many more years. He was introduced to Osler's essays by Dr. Maude Abbott a few months after his medical graduation in 1920 and ever since the Osler Library came to McGill several years later Dr. Segall has been its good friend and generous and discriminating benefactor. One of his recent donations was a long-lost page from Osler's "Post-mortem book of the Montreal General Hospital" discovered by Dr. Segall when it fell out of a book he had bought second-hand (*Osler Library Newsletter*, June 1977).

The monies contributed in honour of Dr. Segall will be used to repair and restore some of the most important and most valuable books and manuscripts in the Osler Library.

## OSLER DAY — 1978

A previous *Newsletter* (June 1976) reported that McGill University had established an Osler Day to be observed annually on the day of the meeting of the Board of Curators of the Osler Library and the Osler Society Banquet. The events of that day also include an Osler Lecture. The first Osler Day fell on April 20th, 1977 (*Osler Library Newsletter*, June 1977). The second Osler Day will be April 19th, 1978. The Osler Lecturer will be The Honourable Mr. Justice Thomas R. Berger of the Supreme Court of British Columbia. He will discuss some of the moral and ethical issues that arise with the advance of the industrial system to the frontier and the consequent impact on the northern environment and northern native peoples. A special additional event of Osler Day 1978 will be the official opening of the Francis Wing (*Osler Library Newsletter*, June 1977).

## REGINALD HARRISON HILL (1894-1976)

The Osler Library has rather belatedly received news of the death on October 15th, 1976 of Mr. R.H. Hill. All Oslerians will recall that he was one of the editors of the *Bibliotheca Osleriana*. He began his distinguished bibliographic career as a junior helper in the Bodleian Library. He served on the staff of the Bodleian from 1908 to 1944 and was Librarian and Secretary to the Trustees of the National Central Library from 1945 to 1958. According to Dr. W.W. Francis, Mr. Hill was associated with the *Bibliotheca Osleriana* for a greater number of years than any other person. It has been said that his expert bibliographic work on that monumental volume has placed all medical bibliographers in his debt.

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