

OSLER LIBRARY NEWSLETTER

McGILL UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL, CANADA

No. 34 — JUNE 1980

FOOTNOTES TO THE BIBLIOTHECA OSLERIANA

1. Death, Heaven, and Hell.



It is well known that the idiosyncratic arrangement of the *Bibliotheca Osleriana* was a pet notion of Osler's to which he clung in the face of numerous objections. In theory there is nothing wrong with the idea of a *Bibliotheca Prima* but in practice no such selection has ever been completely successful, as witness the now curious names chiselled outside certain turn-of-the-century art galleries. The *Bibliotheca's* title-page proclaims that the library illustrates the history of medicine and science but the contents do not entirely justify the addition of "and science." Even if one allows that they do, it goes hard in a fundamentally medical catalogue to find in the Valhalla of 'Prima' the like of Joule and John Couch Adams while Beaumont and Fracastoro languish in 'Secunda'.

At 13 Norham Gardens the books were probably arranged in a much more companionable way. In the Editor's Preface to the catalogue there is an intriguing and easily overlooked statement made in explaining *Bibliotheca Litteraria*. "Scattered through this and other parts of the catalogue," it says, "are many books and pamphlets on longevity, death, immortality, spiritualism, and witchcraft. On the shelves at Oxford these were grouped together in a section familiarly known as Death, Heaven and Hell." Now that is the kind of section that would make for good browsing and W.W. Francis made certain that it could be largely reconstructed through the index. There "Death" has a squadron of entries and included too is "see also Burial; Euthanasia; Immortality; Suicide." Tracking down some of these entries leads to the conclusion that Osler had a foresighted and professional interest in matters of aging and death. Though he would have laughed at the pretentious terminology, he might have had some sympathy with the concern that has led some American institutions to add to their personnel classifications a place for a "Thanatologist."

The collection includes an early edition of Bichat's *Recherches physiologiques sur la vie et la mort*, though not the first, and also the American translation. There is Brouardel on death and sudden death, and Lauvergne, *De l'Agonie et de la Mort dans toutes les Classes de la Société*, 2 volumes, Paris 1842. A literary as well as a physiological view is taken; the translation of Maeterlinck's *Death*, London 1911, was reviewed by Osler for the *Spectator* and is 5108 in the catalogue. Premature burial, which so preoccupied early Victorians that they sometimes equipped coffins with bell-pulls, rates seven entries. There are numbers of books which would hardly have

The members of the Editorial Committee take pleasure in the fact that the leading article in this issue is by Professor G.S.T. Cavanagh, Curator of the Trent Collection of Duke University Medical Center Library in Durham, North Carolina. Quite apart from his interest in Osler and Osleriana, Professor Cavanagh is no stranger to the Osler Library. He served a brief apprenticeship with Dr. W.W. Francis when a student at the McGill Library School and, in 1951-52, he was a member of the staff of the McGill Medical Library, then just across the hall from the Osler.

found their way into the catalogue but for their contribution to a subject which Osler was collecting for its own sake; e.g., Carrington's *Death: its causes and phenomena, with special reference to Immortality*, London 1911. Another may be C.A. Ewald who earns a place with two geriatric writings (2551-2) but not with his more substantial work on digestive diseases. Even Nothnagel fails of admission except for one minor piece which happens to be *Das Sterben*. The prolific Tardieu would be missing but for a *concoirs* thesis on cemeteries.

Examples could be multiplied but there is no doubt that Death as a subject was enough to place almost any book on the Oslerian shelves. In one (no. 3620), a reprint from *JAMA*, 1912, Roswell Park claims the invention of the term Thanatology. When he put this essay into a volume called *The Evil Eye, Thanatology, and other essays*, Boston 1912, he dedicated it to Osler, a thing he would hardly have done had Osler been indifferent to the subject. The third edition of that very rich book, F. Parkes Weber's *Aspects of Death... in Art, Epigram and Poetry*, London 1918, was also dedicated to and reviewed by Osler who called it "by far the most important contribution in English" and promoted it into the select company of the physician's bed-side library (5577). Osler's house officers and nurses at Johns Hopkins were required to record specific observations of dying patients and the results of 486 cases make up an unpublished Osler MS, *A Study of Dying* (7644), which would probably repay study by a present-day scholar.

The very numerous references to Immortality may be partly attributed to WO's struggles with the subject for his Ingersoll Lectures, *Science and Immortality*, 1904. Following this thread through the catalogue leads one neatly to Euthanasia and Suicide. The fourth impression of *A Way of Life*, 1925, included at Osler's behest a poem, "The salutation of the dawn", which he learned about from Olga Jacoby whose *Words in pain* is Osler 4997 and who took "fate in her own hands." Osler inserted a report of the inquest of her death in his first edition of Donne's *Biathanatos*. His lengthy note to this last (4742) ends with this paragraph: "It is not surprising in this Lucretian age when to many death is the 'be all and end all', that we find men who, when beaten to the pit, deem

The decorated letter on this page is taken from Professor Cavanagh's personal copy of Guenther von Andernach's *Anatomicarum Institutionum* published by Robert Winter, Basle, 1539.

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

it more worthy to leap in than tarry to be pushed." This can only have been written during World War One and is a far blacker statement of a desirable dissolution than the "Fixed Period" address which caused such a stir in 1905. Reassembled, the shelves of Death, Heaven and Hell seem to reflect a long effort to come to terms with Osler's and every physician's grim familiar.

2. The 1862 *Religio Medici*.

Osler's devotion to the *Religio Medici* of Sir Thomas Browne was a mystery to W.W. Francis who considered the book dull and obscure. Most of us if pressed to the point of honesty would probably have to side with Francis or else plead ignorance. No doubt there are riches in Sir Thomas and no doubt they yield themselves only to the kind of long familiarity which Osler and very few others have gained over the book in a lifetime with it.

His attention to the collecting of editions of Browne I find easier to understand. In the formation of his library and the planning of the catalogue he was after all proclaiming the medical book as an object deserving of humanistic study. Browne bridged medicine and the arts and was "classical" enough and scarce enough to present some challenge to the collector. Hence the remarkable assemblage of nearly two hundred entries of Browne and Browniana in the *Bibliotheca*.

The copy of the *Religio* which is so well known as the earliest relic of his collecting and which he preserved for more than fifty years was a bibliographically undistinguished electrotyped second impression by Ticknor and Fields, Boston 1862, with little to recommend it beyond Osler's love. Some contemporary comment from a New York book-collecting journal, *The Philobiblion*, indicates that Osler's favorite edition was not universally admired in its own time.

The Philobiblion is quite scarce, having been published as a rider to the antiquarian catalogues of G.P. Philes and Company during 1862-63. It was probably unknown to Osler or it would have been recorded among the 'Imitators' of *Religio Medici* because the first volume includes (pp. 265-9) a partial reprinting of Dunton's *Religio Bibliopolae*. But it is in the second volume of *The Philobiblion* (pp. 30-34) that James T. Fields, who was the Fields of Ticknor and Fields, was charged with putting into his new edition of Browne "all the intelligence furnished him by previous editors, and all the ignorance peculiar to himself. . . . We turn these pages in vain to discover any features of excellence not possessed by former editions, any traces of such editorial labor as might redeem the work from the charge of being utterly superfluous. Several editions of the *Religio Medici*. . . correct, convenient, and handsome — have long been before the public. There was no necessity for a new one, and certainly Mr. Fields was not competent to prepare it, even had such a necessity existed."

Extensive borrowings from Dr. Johnson's life of Browne are then exposed by quoting Johnson and Fields in parallel columns. "The whole number of notes comprised in this volume is two hundred and sixty-six. Of these, one hundred and fifty-six are taken bodily from the well-known Pickering edition. . . . The remaining one hundred and ten are reprinted from the well-known edition of the Works. . . edited by Mr. Simon Wilkin."

"It remains for us to congratulate him on having produced one of those 'pieces' which, according to Sir Thomas Browne himself, are 'only fit to be placed in Pantagruel's library, or bound up with Tartaretus *De Modo Cacandi*.'" . . .

This is *touché*, as in the Thurber cartoon, and if we believe only half of it the 1862 Ticknor and Fields edition is reduced to one more piece of nineteenth-century trans-Atlantic piracy, and we have to suppose that if the young Osler or any other purchaser of Browne had had access to *The Philobiblion* he might have looked for another edition. It matters very little now, and if Fields really was incapable of a good edition, he may yet have produced a useful book by borrowing from good sources.

G.S.T. Cavanagh

EDWARD REVERE OSLER'S ETCHINGS

While doing research in the Osler Library of McGill University in Montreal for a paper on Lady Osler, Miss Marilyn Fransiszyn, Reference and Manuscripts Librarian, suggested I talk to Miss Marion Wright, a resident of the city. She arranged an interview.

Miss Wright was a close friend of Revere, the son of the Oslers. During the afternoon, the conversation turned to Revere whom she described as artistic. He etched in his room at Christ Church College in Oxford and often had her critique his work. Later I interviewed Miss Margaret Revere of Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, about Lady Osler. She showed me cabinet work done by Revere and a print of one of his etchings. I asked Miss Revere for photographs of the furniture pieces. They were made and the etching also was sent as a gift. The print was unsigned and the subject not identified.

A photograph of the etching was made and sent to various people in England, Canada, and the United States asking if they recognized the subject. I had assumed it was a doorway in Oxford, possibly at 13 Norham Gardens. All replies were negative for "The Open Arms" as the location. No one in Oxford could identify a similar place in the colleges.

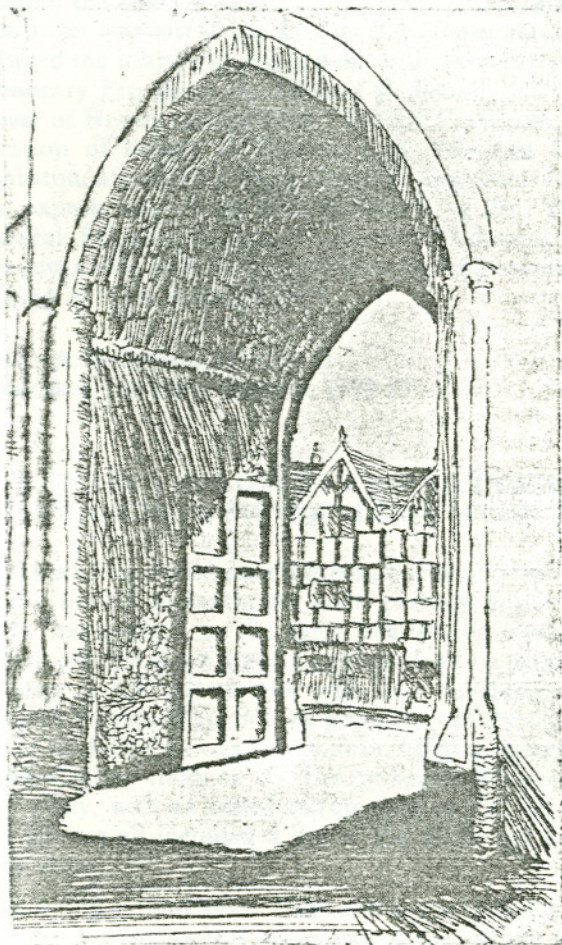
Revere's books had been sent to The Johns Hopkins University as part of a gift by his parents in memory of their son. They are housed in The Tudor and Stuart Club room on the Homewood Campus for the use of the English Department. During a review of the collection, a chest in the room was noted to have decorations similar to the book-rack owned by Miss Revere. A small brass plate under the lid identified it as made by Revere. The secretary serving as guide told me that a cardboard box which might contain other memorabilia was in the files of the Department elsewhere. When examined, it contained among other things six small manila envelopes which held the copper plates of etchings. On the front of each in an unidentified handwriting is the statement that they were done by Edward Revere Osler. Four of the subjects are identified as: Merton College, Oxford; Oxford Castle; Norfolk; Doorway in Norwich. The other two are not identified and one is labelled "cancelled". That plate is scored with parallel lines across it and contains several spots which might have been caused by acid drops. The envelopes are not dated, but my guess is the etchings were done between 1913-1914 when

Revere was 18-19 years old. All are of architectural subjects. The print received from Miss Revere was from the Norwich plate.

On being told of the Norwich plate, Dr. A.H.T. Robb-Smith of Woodstock, England recalled that Revere had been tutored in Norwich to prepare for his admission examinations to Oxford. He had in his library a book containing water colours by E.W. Hazelhurst, including one of Stranger's Hall, which he identified as the subject of the Norwich plate. A photograph of the painting shows that Revere etched it in mirror image with a few small deviations in the windows.

The plates have been transferred from the Homewood Campus to a new home in the Alan Mason Chesney Archives of The Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions. Permission has been given to have prints made for those who wish them. Those interested should write to Mr. John E. Sparks, Head of the Department of Prints, Maryland Institute College of Art, 2942 Guilford Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland 21218.

George T. Harrell, Timonium, Maryland



Print of etching by Edward Revere Osler. Subject unidentified.

A BOOK BELONGING TO JAMES BOVELL

The Osler Library has recently finished processing several thousand books received from Laval University. From time to time the Osler Library receives from other libraries books outdated for scientific uses but of importance to the history of medicine. The Laval transfer was valuable for its size and because it consisted mainly — but by no means exclusively — of nineteenth-century French language works.

One of the works received was recognized as of special interest to the Osler Library by Charles Robert, now a reference librarian at the Library of Parliament in Ottawa. It is James Bovell's copy of the second edition of G. Owen Rees, *On the Analysis of the Blood and Urine, in Health and Disease; and on the Treatment of Urinary Diseases* (London, 1845). Bovell was one of Sir William Osler's mentors and one of those to whom Osler dedicated his *magnum opus*, *The Principles and Practice of Medicine*. On the title page, Bovell has signed and dated the book, 1846. On a book-plate of the Medical Department of the Church University of Upper Canada, he indicated that he gave it to this institution in 1850. By some unknown route it made its way to Quebec and the library of the Séminaire des missions étrangères. From that library it went to Laval University and now it has found a home in the Osler Library.

The name "Medical Department of the Church University of Upper Canada" is not a familiar one. This appears to have been the Medical Faculty of Trinity College, a Church of England University in Toronto. The Faculty was established in 1850 with James Bovell as one of its founders and its Dean. It has been recorded that he presented to the "Church University," as it was called, a handsome collection of books. Ours must have been one of the items in that collection.

THE OSLER SOCIETY OF MCGILL UNIVERSITY Report for the Academic Year 1979-80

The walls of the Francis Seminar Room gathered in memories of the 272nd and 273rd meetings of the Osler Society. Dr. George Wald, Higgins Professor Emeritus of Harvard University, delivered the 1980 Osler Lecture, and was the Guest of Honour at the Fifty-Ninth Annual Osler Banquet which followed.

On November 14, Danielle Perreault of the second year medical class presented her second film to the Society, "Life and Health in Chile." As a member of a health care team, Danielle had a unique opportunity to learn of the people in the small Chilean village, Achao. Overcoming the obstacle of her subjects' constant desire to stand still so as not to blur the film, she did a marvellous job of recording something of the work and life of these people. We hope that she will continue her filming when she travels to Nigeria next year, and again offer us a showing.

On February 13, Dr. Joseph Lella of the Department of the History of Medicine, spoke on the trials and tribulations of "the medical identity" among students, professors and G.P.'s at the University of Bordeaux II. In his talk, "Becoming a Doctor in Bordeaux: From Amphi to Vineyard in Seven Years," Dr. Lella provided a fascinating description of undergraduate and postgraduate medical

training as he saw it during his six months there as a visiting professor. He also gave a well appreciated account of the wines of the area, as we drank the samples in the immediate vicinity.

The Fourth Annual Osler Lecture, "Life in a Lethal Society," was presented on Osler Day, April 23, 1980. With no microphone or notes, for a full hour and a half, Dr. Wald projected throughout the large Palmer Howard Amphitheatre his portrayal of the dooming effects which man's technological revolution will have on his own future. He spoke of the folly of man's pride in the use of fossil fuels, which nature had gone through such pains to release itself from by evolving photosynthesis. The problems of world food distribution were restated, not as impossible, but as unprofitable, to solve. From insights into multinational corporate influence he passed on to a scathing analysis of nuclear energy production. The intriguing presentation ended with a reflection on man's massive store of nuclear weapons, exceeding the destructive power of four tons of TNT for every man, woman and child on the face of the earth. The message, for physicians and all others, was that each human has the responsibility to fight to avoid impending self-extinction.

In the evening, the Fifty-Ninth Osler Banquet was held at the McGill Faculty Club. The meaning of the pilchards on Sir William's coat-of-arms was reinterpreted, and eyes again searched for the "bloody hand of Ulster." Despite the absence of available swords, not one brave banqueter was lost in the Loving Cup Toast; alas, King Edward the Martyr was born a millenium too early! Our Honorary President, Dr. Edward H. Bensley, made the Guest of Honour an "official" MDCM II with the presentation of Osler's *A Way of Life*. Principal David Johnston, at our Osler Banquet for the first time, recalled his experiences as an undergraduate in Dr. Wald's Natural Sciences 5 class at Harvard University. The banquet ended with the gusto it deserved in a resounding singing of "Our Regius Prof."

Kevin A. Sevarino, MDCM II
Chairman, the Osler Society, 1979-80

THE SPRING 1980 OSLER LIBRARY EXHIBIT "THE PRECIOUS MINERALS OF MEDICINE"

Historians have paid only limited attention to the therapeutic use of stones in the past, perhaps because the early "lapidaries", as the early treatises on stones are called, contain much that is now regarded as superstition, making it difficult to link with any development in modern therapeutics. But the popularity of the lapidary in the Middle Ages was tremendous. Most were based on mineralogical treatises by Theophrastus, Dioscorides, and Pliny, with an added astrological or Biblical slant, but almost all included a list of the medicinal uses of each stone.

The spring exhibit at the Osler Library included a good selection of mediaeval lapidaries, some of the works from classical antiquity which gave rise to them, and a look at some medical writings from the modern age containing vestiges of the old stone lore. McGill has earned a place in this unusual history: a mineral discovered on campus over a century ago and named after

Sir William Dawson, McGill's Principal, is now swallowed by thousands of sufferers from hyperacidity.

The exhibit was greatly enhanced by specimens of precious and semi-precious stones kindly loaned by Mrs. Louise S. Stevenson, Curator of Geology of the Redpath Museum, McGill University.

Marilyn Fransiszyn
Reference and Manuscripts Librarian
Osler Library

FRIENDS OF THE OSLER LIBRARY

The appeal to the Friends for the 1979-80 academic year concluded at the end of May and the Library is very gratified to receive about \$7,800 contributed by 224 Friends. The appeal for the 1980-81 academic year will be made in the October *Newsletter*. The Library acknowledges with thanks the support of all its Friends. The following have been added to the list since the publication of the February *Newsletter*.

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