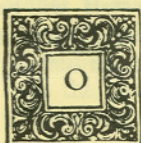


# OSLER LIBRARY NEWSLETTER

McGILL UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL, CANADA

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## John Locke and his Books



ONE BOOK IN THE OSLER LIBRARY which is perhaps prized less for its content than for its association with a great man of letters is a small book of poems by Virgil, *Bibl. Osl.* 1062, the title page of which is reproduced as fig. 1. This volume did not belong to Osler but was one of the many valuable items added to his collection in his memory by Mr. L.L. Mackall. Its original owner, however, was John Locke.

Our purpose here is not to discuss the writings of this 17th century philosopher-physician, sometimes called "the father of English empiricism," whose ideas on education, economics and religious tolerance influenced thought in England long after his death, and whose political theories, particularly his *Two Treatises on Government*, inspired the makers of both the French and American Revolutions. Rather, this little book will provide the focus for a look at the unique and painstaking way Locke had of organizing the items in his library and perhaps provide some insight into his character. For the story of the fate of his books and for the details which indicate his ownership, we are indebted to Harrison and Laslett, *The Library of John Locke*, Oxford University Press, 1965.

The most obvious sign that this book belonged to Locke is his signature on the verso of the first fly-leaf (fig. 2). After asserting his ownership of a new acquisition in this way, Locke recorded the book's press-mark or call number inside the front cover and on the spine; the latter was marked by the adhesion of a small label if the book was bound in calf or by writing directly onto the surface if it was bound in vellum. According to Locke's system of cataloguing, the books were arranged, not by subject or author or other conventional means, but alphabetically by size, from 11 inches down to five inches. This press-mark, therefore, provided the sole means by which Locke, referring to his library catalogue, could find any given volume.

The press-mark of the Osler Library's book was  $\frac{8}{238}$ , indicating to Locke that it was the 238th book eight inches in

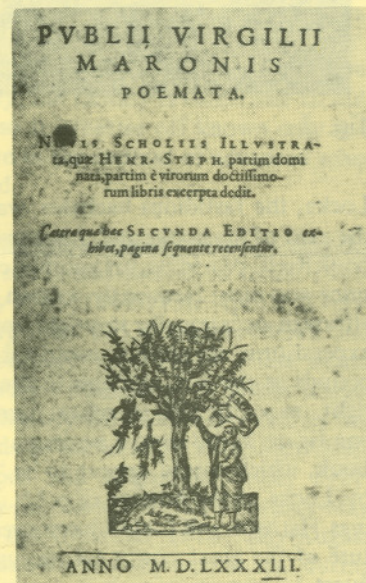


fig. 1

height. The vellum binding of this volume is original, a typical example of the simple tastes of this unpretentious scholar. Unfortunately, despite expert care during restoration of the binding, the press-mark, extremely faint in any case, could not be preserved and is no longer visible on our copy.

The title page of a book provides yet another tell-tale sign that it belonged to Locke: the underlining of the last two digits of the date of publication. In this case (see fig. 1), the last *three* digits of the date, 1583, are underlined, a practice which Locke used in dealing with books published in the 16th century. A similar mark is found at the back of many of Locke's books: the overlining of the last page number. From these two features, the meticulous Locke was able to construct a sort of shorthand reference to any book in his collection; a page reference would similarly be expressed as a fraction using the overlined figure as the denominator. Although this practice of overlining was not used in this volume of Virgil, probably because of the discontinuous pagination, the example cited by Harrison and Laslett will serve as an excellent, and rather amusing, illustration of this point. Choisy 87  $\frac{377}{377}$  refers to a title by F.J. Choisy (*Journal du Voyage de Siam*) published in 1687 and containing 377 pages. On p.104 of Vol. 1 of the Dover edition, 1959, of Locke's classic *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, a reference to this work appears using the fraction  $\frac{107}{377}$ . This no doubt was copied from Locke's manuscript and carried down through every edition, completely unintelligible until Harrison and Laslett broke Locke's code, so to speak, revealing the significance of the fraction to be a reference to p.107 of that edition of Choisy which has 377 pages.

The historiated letter used in this issue is from a book of Locke's writings in the Osler Library, *A Collection of several Pieces of Mr. John Locke ...*, London, 1720, *Bibl. Osl.* no. 1034.

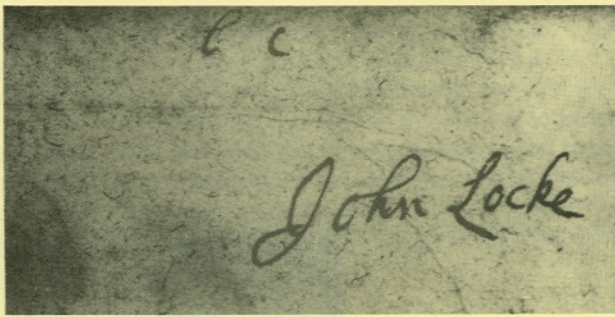


fig. 2

Locke, the fastidious bachelor, was not unconcerned about the cost of his books and this was carefully recorded on the book itself, providing yet another clue to its ownership. The price was most frequently written in at the bottom of p.11, although occasionally it would appear on p.9 or p.13. An expenditure in sterling would be expressed by writing pounds at the left, shillings in the centre, and pence at the right; expenditures in other currencies would show only one figure in the central position. The cost of the Library's book, which would appear to be "5 sh," has been recorded by Locke at the bottom of p.11. In explaining these markings, Harrison and Laslett have given us "...an intriguing picture of the great savant solemnly considering a visitor's request to borrow or to buy a volume. His slow rustling of the leaves was not simply deliberation. He was finding out how much the book had cost him."

For most of his life Locke's books were divided between Oxford and London while he himself spent many years in exile in Holland without them. In 1691 he returned to England and settled at Otes, the estate of Sir Francis Masham, where he remained until his death in 1704. Here Locke began to reassemble his library around him. In 1697 each of his books was checked against the catalogue he had compiled earlier and the symbols *b*, *bc* or *c* were written in each volume with him at Otes at that time. The letters *bc* above his signature in our book of Virgil (see fig. 2) indicate that this volume was with Locke in his last years.

We cannot trace with certainty the path this volume took until it came to Osler's collection in 1921, for the fate of Locke's library, although fascinating, is a sad and complicated story. During his lifetime, Locke owned approximately 3,500 volumes, although not all were with him at Otes. Of the books which surrounded him at his death, half were willed to the son of Sir Francis Masham and half to Peter King, Locke's second cousin. Unfortunately many items in the Masham collection have been dispersed among various libraries, public and private, and many more have disappeared. About two-thirds of the King collection, on the other hand, were found in 1951, forgotten and damaged, in a hunting lodge in England owned by the descendants of Peter King; these books, roughly one-quarter of Locke's 3,500, are now in Oak Spring, Virginia, the home of Paul Mellon. One day they will be returned to the Bodleian at Oxford where Locke's library got its start over 300 years ago.

## Osler Society Banquet

Friends of the Osler Society will want to make a special note of Friday, April 3rd, the date of this year's Banquet. The guest speaker for the evening, Dr. Robert A.H. Kinch, head of obstetrics and gynecology at the Montreal General Hospital, will speak, appropriately, on "The Historical Aspects of What Women Are For." Tickets, at \$10.00 for attending staff and \$5.00 for students and house staff, will be available from John Esdaile or Bob Rothwell, MDCM III, or from the Osler Library.

## Mail Order Auction

The Osler Library is responsible for disposing of a number of duplicate items from its collection and from the Medical Library. At their last meeting, the Board of Curators authorized the sale of some of these items directly to our *Newsletter* readers. This, the first lot, consists of "old warhorse textbooks" which were owned by McGill professors and students. Many are in battered and worn condition. Perhaps you will recognize a former fellow student or teacher, and wish to acquire the item with his autograph as a memento. In the listing enclosed, the citation of the book is followed by a bookplate note or a transcription, in quotation marks, of the inscription in the book. This is followed by a brief identification of the inscriber or author.

The minimum bid on each item is \$5.00 (U.S. or Canadian). Books are sold to the highest bidder. In the case of tie bids, the first written bid received will take the book. Bids must be received by the Library in writing by May 1, 1970. At that time, the books and invoices will be shipped to the high bidders. Please do not send any money at the time you make your bid.

The proceeds from this sale (and all others) will go into a common fund for the development of the Osler Library and Medical Library collections. Further lists will be offered in forthcoming issues of the *Newsletter*.

## Medicine and the Mystic Arts

During the months of September through November, an exhibit with this title was on display. Of the 24 items shown, 20 were in the original collection of Sir William Osler.

In this age of science, characterized by exact measurement, chemical and biological analysis, statistical and mathematical proofs, it may be difficult to appreciate the close relationship that once existed between what were sometimes called "sacred mysteries" and the daily practice of medicine. Perhaps the overriding theme is the influence of the stars — the *macrocosm* — upon the destiny of an individual man — the *microcosm*.

The display included books on astrology, witchcraft, palmistry, alchemy, physiognomy and phrenology (the latter graced by a splendid 19th century ceramic bust).

One of the Library's regular readers is Axel Harvey, a local astrologer and vice-president of the International Society for Astrological Research. He is the compiler of *A Working Bibliography of Astrological Books in Montreal Libraries* [Montreal, 1969], a mimeographed checklist in which the holdings of the Osler Library figure prominently. Indeed, Mr. Harvey tells us that, in his opinion, the Osler's holdings make it the finest *occult* library in Canada. Mr. Harvey kindly agreed to cast a horoscope for the Library, and it is presented below. We decided that the "birth date" for the Library was 3:30 p.m., May 29, 1929, when it was formally dedicated. Herewith, the horoscope:

### *Notes on the Inceptional Horoscope of the Osler Library*

The first thing to do, when one is given such an unlikely task as plotting the horoscope of an artificial organism, is to check with the facts to see whether or not the horoscope works. Now, in the last week of October Miss Wells gave talks at some librarians' meetings in the United States: transiting Mercury trines Mercury in the Library chart — the institution communicating (Mercury) with other institutions in a foreign land (Mercury lord of the IXth house). Not bad. On October 14 we have the bomb scare: ah! Mars is on the exact degree which had been occupied by the northern meridian at the hour and minute of the Library's dedication. We seem to have a live horoscope.

Contrary to its superficial appearance and behaviour, the Library is an airy-fiery-cardinal entity. Sun in Gemini, Moon in Aquarius, Ascendant in Libra (12°), Mid-heaven in Cancer (15°) and five planets in the fire signs.

Why does an apparently sedate institution have such flamboyant elements in its chart? Two answers. The flamboyance is overshadowed by the constricting power of Saturn, so that its true nature — experimental, playful, esoteric, and even daring — is always hidden behind a conservative archival facade. Secondly, the Library is vulnerable to sudden crises and scandals, so it is better off known only to a very few people, few even in the context of advanced scholarship in a restricted field.

One imagines — those who know please verify — that the Library passed through crises or slumps at these times: 1945-1946, especially June-July 1945; 1949-1950; April and July-September 1952; January-June 1953; January-March and June-December 1960; February-April 1968. These would have to do with the Library's leadership, its public image, its relations with the University administration, and its finances. Worrisome periods in the next 10 years are: October-November 1970; April and August-November 1971; April-August 1972; July-September 1974; February-May 1975; November 1977 to November 1978; May-August 1979. The last two periods are especially critical, and during the years 1977-1979 a long succession of upheavals will culminate in a fundamental and unpopular change in the organization of the Library.

This should not discourage one from looking at the positive side of the chart. In the next 10 years the Library will perform some of its greatest services to the world of learning, and, as usual, they will not be sufficiently noticed. The "bad" periods in the autumns of 1970 and 1971, although full of difficulties, will see some very original and useful ideas put into effect; so will the tense year 1979. The Golden Age does not come, however, until 1983-1984, when a wealth of new ideas and techniques will appear and bring permanent improvements. In any case the Library's accomplishments are always out of the ordinary. It will continue to acquire special, esoteric collections, and to serve the needs of some highly unusual scholars in an atmosphere which is highly unusual for a Canadian library.

Aside from the specific periods of tension I have mentioned, there are petty problems which never go away. Librarians in other institutions tend to behave underhandedly or suspiciously in any official dealings. The physical plant, under the

influence of the Venus-Saturn-Neptune grand trine, is always in the best taste, always impresses the visitor; but it contains hidden flaws which interfere with the Library's work. The worst period in this respect is 1970-1971, during which time much attention will have to be paid to the building unless serious disruptions are desired. Conditions are not likely to improve markedly until the 1980's when the removal of an obstacle (human or institutional) will help the Library's physical plant.

## Board of Curators

In the last issue of our *Newsletter*, we featured an article on the Library's Board of Curators. Several of our readers were prompted to ask "Who are they?" Since we had planned a follow-up in this issue indicating the membership of the Board at its last meeting in October, we cannot truthfully begin this piece by saying "In response to popular request... ." However, the list which follows is printed especially for those readers who asked.

### *Ex officio membership*

*Dr. Maurice McGregor*, Dean of Medicine and Chairman of the Board;  
*Dr. H. Roche Robertson*, Principal of McGill;  
*Mr. Philip Osler*, family representative;  
*Dr. Martin Cummings*, Director of the National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, Maryland;  
*Dr. S.M. Banfill*, Medical Faculty representative;  
*Mr. Ragnvald Okkenhaug*, medical student representative;  
*Mr. Keith Crouch*, Director of University Libraries;  
*Mrs. Janet Cheasley*, Acting Medical Librarian;  
*Dr. Donald G. Bates*, Chairman, Dept. of History of Medicine;  
*Miss Ellen Wells*, Associate Osler Librarian.

### *Elected membership*

*Dr. Wilder Penfield* (Honorary Osler Librarian), Montreal;  
*Dr. William Feindel*, Montreal;  
*Dr. E.H. Bensley*, Montreal;  
*Dr. Douglas G. Cameron*, Montreal;  
*Dr. H.E. MacDermot*, Montreal;  
*Dr. Samuel X. Radbill*, Philadelphia;  
*Dr. Fred B. Rogers*, Philadelphia;  
*Dr. Lloyd G. Stevenson*, Baltimore;  
*Dr. W.M. Fitzhugh*, Monterey, California;  
*Dr. W. Kaye Lamb*, Ottawa.

The 34th meeting of the Board of Curators was held in the Library on the morning of October 23rd, 1969. The meeting coincided with the official appearance of the reprinted *Bibliotheca Osleriana* and a "coming-out" party, sponsored jointly by the Library and the McGill-Queen's University Press, was held in the afternoon in the W.W. Francis Seminar Room, attended by some 75 guests.

A number of items of particular interest to our readers were dealt with by the Curators, including authorization by the Board of the sale of some 2100 duplicate copies of books maintained in the Library's collection. It was agreed, of course, that none of the books which had constituted Osler's original gift would ever be regarded as disposable duplicates, nor would books which had been accepted from a donor on the condition that they remain in the Library's collection. Since a major consideration in the disposal of these duplicates is the realization of profit for the Library, some of the more valuable items will in time be offered for sale by an auction house. Canadian medical school libraries will be given an opportunity to purchase Canadiana medical journals, and some other items will be offered to other libraries through the MLA Exchange. Items which have a special association with McGill are offered elsewhere in this issue to *Newsletter* readers.

During 1969, the 50th anniversary of Osler's death, many requests were received by the Library to publish various of Osler's manuscripts or manuscripts in his collection. Hitherto permission to publish anything beyond a limited quotation for purposes of documentation required approval from the Board, a situation which created many difficulties in an unusually busy year. The Curators agreed, therefore, that the librarian's discretionary powers permitting publication could extend to entire letters or manuscripts of short length if he judges the intent of publication to be for documentation and not for the publication of the manuscript *per se*.

One manuscript whose publication the Curators had previously approved is "The Inner History of The Johns Hopkins Hospital," a brief account in Osler's hand of the early years of The Johns Hopkins Hospital and Medical School with personal comments on some of the people involved. This manuscript, edited and annotated by Drs. Donald Bates and E.H. Bensley of the Department of the History of Medicine, and Curators of the Library, appeared in the October 1969 issue of *The Johns Hopkins Medical Journal* (Vol. 125, No. 4, pp 184-194).

We might also draw the attention of our readers to the special Osler commemorative issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, December 22, 1969 (Vol. 210, No. 12), which contains several articles using previously unpublished manuscript materials from the Library.