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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

SIR WILLIAM OSLER, BART., M.D., F.R.S., &c.

THE news received on December 30th, 1919, of the death of Sir William Osler, which had occurred on the previous afternoon at Oxford, England, threw a gloom over the whole medical profession of Canada. Sir William was as well known in Canada, his native country, as the premier.

Sir William Osler was born at Bond Head, Ontario, in 1849. His father was a Church of England clergyman, the Rev. F. L. Osler, M.A. (Cantab.). He was born on July 12th, hence was called William after William of Orange; he was the sixth son. Educated at Trinity College School, Trinity College, Toronto; Toronto University and McGill University, Montreal, he graduated in medicine in 1872; he then went abroad for two years and studied in London, Vienna, and Berlin. On his return to Montreal in 1874 he was appointed to the Chair of the Institutes of Medicine in McGill University, made vacant by the resignation of Dr. Joseph Morley Drake, and held this Chair for ten years.

He was president of the Canadian Medical Association in 1885, and while residing in Canada was a great strength to the medical community, and did much to stimulate it and advance its interests. As a student he gave early promise of a great future; he was always investigating and trying out things, working independently with his microscope, an instrument which at that time was a rarity, and spending much time in the wards of the General Hospital and the post mortem room. He did not cram for examinations and took no high place in his class, but his graduation thesis on Pathological Anatomy was given a special prize and the specimens illustrating it were valuable additions to the museum.

Dr. Osler was called to Philadelphia to the Chair of Clinical Medicine in Pennsylvania University in 1884, and in 1889 the new Johns Hopkins University and Hospital was forming a medical faculty, and the Chair of Medicine was offered to him. He accepted this post and remained there until 1904. His influence was the greatest in moulding the character and policy of this school, in which work he was assisted by Professor W. H. Welch and afterwards by Professors Halsted, Kelly and F. P. Mall. At Johns Hopkins he wrote his celebrated text-book on the "Practice of

Medicine". This book achieved an immediate success which has never been surpassed. It is the most valuable single volume text-book in medicine ever written, and went through many editions. At a dinner given at the Waldorf Hotel, New York, in May, 1905, by the profession of Canada and the United States, six hundred medical men from all parts of America being present, Dr. J. C. Wilson said this about this Philadelphia period: "Not only by precept but by example has he been an uplifting influence in our professional life. . . . The source of that influence is to be sought not merely in his accomplishments as a physician, not in learning, not in his wisdom, not even in his well-balanced buoyant temperament, but in that basic principle which we all recognize but never can define, which for want of a descriptive name we call 'character'." Dr. W. H. Welch, in a speech at the same dinner to Osler, said: "His most striking contributions to the life at Johns Hopkins has been the interest which he has aroused among the students and the personal influence which has enabled him to bring out in them the best of their moral and intellectual points."

This is what the men of these two cities thought of him, and they voiced the opinion of the profession. The late Abraham Jacobi said at the same dinner: "The life-long work in which you invested your aims and ideals has ever been a labour of love and no hardship; you have not exerted yourself to earn thanks, and have expected none. . . . Your character and learning, your sound judgement and warm heart, your generosity and consistency, have gained thousands of friends. . . . There is nobody here or outside that coming near you has not been attracted, improved and inspired by you."

These are indeed words of great praise, but not too great, and are perfectly true; no one who ever met Osler could fail to be impressed by his personality and to feel that he was in the presence of a great man. In England he was much appreciated, not only as a physician but as a man and a force in the community; his unconventional ways and direct manner were a revelation to the rather exclusive, stand-off, university circles and his excursions into literature were always welcomed by a large body of admirers. Whilst at McGill he instituted many reforms and innovations, and the dead bones of the faculty were brought to life again. He was a continual inspiration to the students and his colleagues. He made pathology an important part of the teaching and his vast experience in the post-mortem rooms and wards of the Montreal



OSLER AS A STUDENT AT MCGILL, 1871

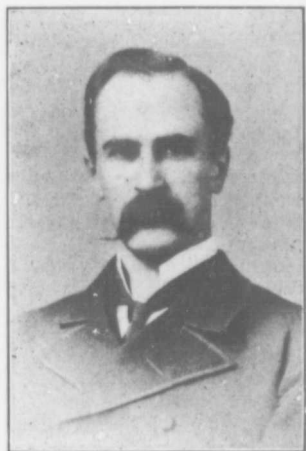
General Hospital was the basis of his great work on the "Practice of Medicine". Of course, all who knew him felt his personality; he was beloved by his students, chiefly because of his abundant sympathy, his naturalness and his vast fund of humour. His colleagues and medical friends were often the subjects of his practical jokes, which were always harmless and generally intensely amusing.

Whilst a physician to the hospital, he edited the first volume of the Montreal General Hospital reports, his own contribution consisting chiefly of the second part of his celebrated pathological reports, which occupied nearly one hundred pages. Dr. Maude Abbott, curator of the McGill Medical Museum, informs me that the specimens described in his pathological reports are still in the museum, having escaped the fire of 1907, and also that the wonderful specimens of endocarditis on which his Gulstonian Lectures of 1885 were founded, are still in good preservation.

When he left McGill for Pennsylvania, there was much regret but the spirit he had created and the influence he had exerted on the younger men remained. He was most suggestive as to the various lines of work he recommended to earnest students and many men owe much of their success to his stimulating personality and sound advice. He himself always said his life was much influenced by the three men to whom he dedicated his "Practice of Medicine". First, the Rev. W. A. Johnson, of Weston, Ontario; next, James Bovell, of the Toronto School of Medicine; and third, Robert Palmer Howard, professor of medicine in McGill University. The writer has often watched Osler unconsciously scribbling at meetings and afterwards looking at the blotter would find the name of James Bovell written all over it. He it was who instructed Osler in the microscope, though he got his first lessons from Rev. W. A. Johnson. Dr. Howard encouraged and directed him in his pathological and clinical work and remained his warm friend until his death in 1889.

Sir William Osler was naturally of a religious temperament, and was much influenced by the Rev. W. A. Johnson. When a student at McGill, he was an ardent attendant at St. John's Church, a very high church indeed, under the care of the Rev. Mr. Wood. He was often seen at early service before breakfast. Had he lived in the 12th or 13th centuries he would have been a monk and would no doubt have been a second Bishop Hugo of Lichfield. Osler was always intended by his father for the Church and actually attended divinity lectures for one year at Trinity College, Toronto.

As a clinical teacher, Osler was at his best; not only was he



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an acute diagnostician and a clear expositor, but he treated his hospital patients most kindly, as human beings and not as mere cases. His example was one which made a great impression on his students and the Osler tradition of gentleness and sympathy with patients was handed on.

Sir William's influence on medicine has been unique, for it has been exercised both on this continent and in Europe, so his death will be felt seriously over a wide area. Not only has a great medical man gone from amongst us, but a great man. As an author on subjects not exclusively medical he was fairly prolific. His "*Æquanimitas*", 1904, "*Counsels and Ideals*," 1905, "*An Alabama Student, and other Biographical Essays*," 1908, were addresses delivered at one time or another on various ethical, historical, and biographical subjects. The Ingersoll Lecture, delivered at Harvard in 1904, created much interest and discussion. In it he said he would "rather be mistaken with Plato than be in the right with those who deny altogether the life after death". "*A Way of Life*," of 1914, was a charming essay. "*Science and the War*," 1915, was a lecture delivered before the Leeds medical students, and was rather a pessimistic address, though he looked forward to a time when "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more". He also delivered last year a wonderful address before the Classical Association, of which he was president, which astonished everybody by his wide knowledge of literature. As a writer he had an excellent style, terse, to the point, every word telling, short sentences and no obscurity. He said what he wanted to say and then stopped—a rare quality in a writer. In his one volume on the "*Practice of Medicine*" there was more "meat" than in many systems. He loved books and libraries and was a great collector of rare editions and had a wide and accurate knowledge of many little known great books. His excursions into the historical side of medicine were numerous and instructive, and his biographical studies, such as that of "*Linacre*", were most accurate and valuable.

He was most human in all his ways and had high ideals but not unattainable ones. His influence in a medical community was always for peace, and against warring factions; under his direction enemies would lay down their weapons and become friends. He had a great love for little children and no one who has ever seen him in a children's ward could ever doubt it.

This obituary might suitably close with a quotation from his speech at the great dinner given him on his leaving the Johns



AS PREFECT IN TRINITY COLLEGE SCHOOL

Hopkins University for Oxford: "I have had three personal ideals, one to do the day's work well and not bother about tomorrow. . . . The second ideal has been to act the Golden Rule as far as in me lay toward my professional brethren and towards the patients committed to my care. And the third has been to cultivate such a spirit of equanimity as would enable me to bear success with humility, the affection of my friends without pride, and to be ready when the day of sorrow and grief came to meet it with courage befitting a man."

"I have loved no darkness,
Sophisticated no truth,
Nursed no delusion,
Allowed no fears."

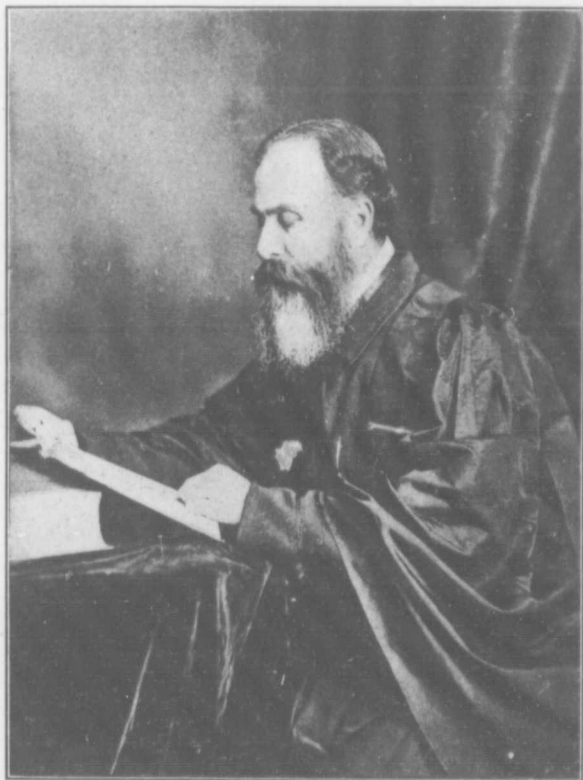
Such was Osler, such were his ideals, and nobly did he live up to them.

Although far removed, especially in later years, he never forgot his Alma Mater; he was always endeavouring in one way or another to advance her interests. He was continually giving rare books to the library, or raising money for some object such as making and printing a catalogue of the museum, in which he took intense interest and which contained many of his own specimens. It is not a secret that he has left his magnificent library of rare books and incunabula to the McGill Medical Library and directed that his ashes should be deposited with his books.

Sir William Osler had received many honours from home and foreign lands; he had a hatful of LL.D.s., was honorary member of many foreign societies, was F.R.S. and F.R.C.P., London, and was made a Baronet in 1911.

Sir William was married in 1892 to Mrs. Samuel Gross, née Revere, of Boston, Mass., by whom he is survived. He had one son, who was the joy of his father's heart, having many fine literary tastes, but he, unfortunately, was killed in the war. This blow was a severe one and although Sir William bore up bravely, he never fully recovered from the shock. During the railway strike in England last autumn, Sir William had to take a long drive in bitter weather in a motor, and caught a severe cold; bronchopneumonia developed, then empyema with operation; a few days later he succumbed to sudden hæmorrhage.

F. J. SHEPHERD



JAMES BOVELL

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