

PAGES

MISSING

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THE PATHOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS OF THE LATE SIR
WILLIAM OSLER AND HIS RELATIONS WITH
THE MEDICAL MUSEUM OF MCGILL
UNIVERSITY

I. THE PATHOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS

IN the passing of Sir William Osler, Canada mourns the loss of one of the greatest of her sons and the Canadian profession its most beloved and distinguished member; one whose name has been as a household word among us, whose scientific enthusiasm has leavened, and clinical acumen inspired the medical teaching of the past three generations and whose warm-hearted hospitality has been shared by the Profession of two continents these many years. Those portals now are darkened, and the light of mingled human kindness and genius that shone from those burning eyes has been forever quenched. To us there remains a great sadness, and an inheritance that is inviolate,—the name of the great Canadian physician, and the tradition of his early formative years.

At this time of retrospect it is of great interest to know that this country possesses what may be termed a unique memorial of these first twelve years of his professional life, in the form of the Pathological Collections which he made during his term as pathologist to the Montreal General Hospital, and which are housed, in an excellent state of preservation and with full records pertaining thereto, in the Medical Museum of McGill University. These collections are of the utmost biographical interest, and as such they are an asset of immense value in the history of modern medicine.

It is common knowledge that Dr. Osler came from Toronto to McGill in the final years of his medical course, graduating from this school in 1872; that after two years of post-graduate study in Berlin and Vienna he returned to Montreal in 1874 and was appointed, at McGill, Professor of the Institutes of Medicine, which Chair comprised the subjects of Physiology and Pathology; that in 1877 he became Pathologist to the Montreal General Hospital, and that he held these two posts until he left Montreal for Philadelphia in 1884. So that, as in the case of so many of the great clinicians and Masters of Medicine who went before him and whose lives

he loved to study, the foundations of the skill and knowledge of his later life were built upon strenuous and studious years, spent not only at the bedside, but in the observation, study and demonstration of the great science of pathological anatomy.

The fact is not so well known that during these years, and even earlier, in his student days, he was not only a pathologist, but also, essentially and to a remarkable extent, a museum collector. Just as he was, throughout his life, to use his own words, a note-book man, jotting down for future reference every point of interest as it occurred, so it was natural to him to set aside for preservation, as a permanent record of important facts, any remarkable material which he came across in his autopsies, which illustrated points of teaching value, or which had served him, as it did in almost every case of interest, as a basis for intensive study. In this way he quickly assembled a pathological collection which, while especially rich in specimens of cardiac and arterial disease, is representative of the whole range of human morbid anatomy, and is significant also of his activities in veterinary and medico-legal medicine. Each specimen has been neatly chiselled down by him to show the lesion freed from encumbering details, and remains of pathological interest in the advanced knowledge of to-day. All are fully described in his hospital autopsy-notes, which fill three large volumes, chiefly written in his own flowing hand, every page of which gives evidence of his powers of clear diction and minute observation, as do the specimens of his skill in dissection and selective faculty. Viewed in the light of these records they undoubtedly present, in visible and tangible form, the first stepping-stones in a great career.

From his literary facility and his habit of communicating to others everything of scientific interest within his knowledge, it comes that nearly every specimen in the collection has been reported either in the *Transactions of the Montreal Medico-Chirurgical Society*, the *Montreal General Hospital Reports*, the *Canada Medical and Surgical Journal*, or the *Philadelphia Medical News* of the day, while many have been made also the subject of exhaustive studies published in French, German or other American or Canadian periodicals. The origin of much of his later work is to be traced to these cases, notably that on typhoid fever, tuberculosis, angina pectoris and cardiac lesions. The beautiful series of specimens of malignant endocarditis on which he based his Gulstonian Lectures of 1885 are here intact, as also his anomalies of the semilunar cusps which have been the subject of several

monographs, and the collection of aneurysms which he has left here is among the finest in the world. So also with the chronic valvular disease, cardiac anomalies, pneumokoniosis, gastric ulcer and carcinoma, etc. His "Practice of Medicine" was built up out of his rich memories of these cases and the foregoing clinical experiences, and abounds in such references as "that wonderful parchment heart in the McGill Museum", "the two ball-thrombi occluding a stenosed mitral valve," "that beautiful healed aneurysm," etc., etc., which apply, not only to his own material, but also to the remainder of the Museum collection placed there by others before his time, with every specimen of which he was most intimately familiar. How deeply this familiarity had sunk into his consciousness and had become as it were a part of his personality and even of his affections, is realized only by those who were privileged to share the daily round of his work in later years, and who heard the quotations from his McGill experience constantly upon his lips.

The early history of the Museum and of the Faculty, and their condition at the time of Osler's sojourn as a student, are in place here, for they are among the sources on which his genius fed, and from which he drew his inspiration.

The oldest and the parent Faculty of McGill was its Medical Faculty, which was organized under the name of the Montreal Medical Institution in the year 1824 and through nearly thirty strenuous years carried on practically the whole work of the University. Its Founders and their immediate successors were nearly all graduates of Scottish Universities, men of vigorous personality and broad education who brought with them the traditions and principles of the Edinburgh School, which taught its clinical medicine and surgery, its obstetrics, and gynaecology, by direct observation at the bedside, in the light of the autopsy findings. The Museum was from the first an essential part of the organization of the Faculty, and the repository of cherished pathological specimens which had been obtained through the personal exertions of the clinician with the interest and often in the presence of the whole staff, from cases upon which during life his best skill had been expended.

Into this environment there entered, in the year 1870, as a student in the final years of his course, the youth of twenty-two years of age, who was destined to rank among the leaders of Medicine. We may picture him at this time, with his lithe, slight figure, and dark, almost Spanish colouring, alert, keen, enthusiastic, yet withal

retiring, with the kindly, whimsical, humour that tempered his every thought shining in his eyes, and the fires of a passion for knowledge by direct observation and of consecration to the day's work and to the service of distressed humanity aflame within him, fresh from the counsels of the teachers who had unlocked the doors of Nature to him by the aid of the microscope and had fostered the love of God and man in his heart, replete with the charm that springs from a heart overflowing with affection and good-will to his fellows and that made him the most human and the most lovable of men—so William Osler stood, on the threshold of the unknown future, whose keynote and masterword for him was then and always, *work*, at the parting of the ways.

His interest in the post-mortem room in these student days and his understanding even then of the bearing of a knowledge of anatomy upon clinical medicine, and his free use of the microscope, are among the most interesting facts in his history, illustrating as they do the quick grasp of essentials, which was the most outstanding feature of his genius. With characteristic simplicity of thought and direct action he chose as his graduation thesis the broad subject of Pathological Anatomy itself, illustrated by microscopic slides and by specimens, some of which, those on Typhoid Fever, are probably among those preserved in the Museum to-day. Years afterwards he expressed the vision of the scope and ideals of his profession which had come to him in those youthful days of insight and which coloured his life to its latest hour, in those beautiful words which have sunk into all our hearts:

“When he is satisfied with the beautiful proportions of the interior, its vast and varied dimensions, the intricate and astounding action of its machinery, obeying laws of a singular stability, whose very conflict produces harmony under the government of secondary laws—if there be anything secondary in nature!—when he is satisfied (and such are not satisfied until informed), he will be led to his ultimate object, to take his last lessons from the poor and suffering, the fevered and frenzied, from the Jobs and Lazaruses,—into the pesthouses and prisons, and here, in these magazines of misery and contagion, these Babels of disease and sin, he must not only take up his abode, but following the example of his Divine Master, he must love to dwell there;—*this is Pathology*.

When such an one re-enters the world, he is a physician; his vast labours have not only taught him how little he knows, but that he knows this little well. Conscious of this virtue, he feels no necessity of trumpeting his professional acquirements abroad,

II. DR. OSLER'S RELATIONS WITH THE MUSEUM IN MORE RECENT YEARS

In the year 1898 the writer of this memoir was appointed Assistant-Curator and shortly thereafter Curator, of this Museum. Dr. Osler was at that time Dean of the Faculty and Professor of Medicine at the Johns Hopkins Medical School. But his affection for the scene of his old labours, and his vivid interest in all that pertained to his own collections and to those of his colleagues and predecessors here, led to the establishment of an intercourse which will be of interest to students of his life, in that it discloses in a very real way, certain vital characteristics, namely, his sustained interest in every subject which had once come within his range of study or observation, his capacity for seizing upon relevant facts, as illustrated in these old records, and applying them to the elucidation of the questions which absorbed his present attention; and last, but not least, that instantaneous response and whole-hearted sympathy and support with which he met every earnest worker in medical research, and by which he supplied a stimulus and an inspiration, through hope and discouragement alike, which saved many a virgin effort from failure, and brought to fulfilment the aspirations of hundreds of young lives throughout the length and breadth of this continent, during the twenty years that intervened between his McGill and his Oxford days. For these reasons the necessarily personal nature of the following reminiscence will be excused.

My first meeting with Dr. Osler was in December, 1898, when I was sent by the Faculty to Washington to see the Army Medical Museum and other institutions *en route*. Arrived at Baltimore and following the instinct that impelled nearly everyone where Dr. Osler was concerned, I sought him out, first, with my introduction. I found him, at ten minutes to nine, just leaving his lecture-room for the ward-round, which I was invited to join and followed him with the usual crowd of students, internes and guests. The visit over, the procession had just left the wards when an unpleasant, but certainly fortunate, accident befell me, which threw me suddenly into personal contact with him to an extent that even my connection with McGill was not likely to have done. Standing for a moment with my hand on the lintel of the half-closed door, someone swung the other heavy half-door to, crushing my finger and neatly extracting the nail. Dr. Osler's concern took the form, after the finger had been dressed by an interne, and a profitable morning

given to me in the Pathological Department on his introduction, of an invitation to dinner that evening. "Come at a quarter to seven," he said in the hospital lunch-room where I had been conducted at his request, "and be sure to take a rest this afternoon." The appointed time saw me at No. 1 West Franklin Street and I was shown to Dr. Osler's study where I found him alone among his books. After a few minutes I ventured to ask him if he would give me a reprint of his "Internal Medicine as a Vocation". "Oh, do you like reprints," he said, "come in here." And he led the way into a small room off his study which seemed to me to be completely lined with reprints, arranged in piles on the shelves. "There you are,—and there,—and there," handing me one after the other. "Thomas Dover", "John Keats", "William Pepper", "Locke as a Physician", etc., etc., until I had a great pile. "And this, he said, handing me a blue pamphlet, "is the one I like better than anything else I have ever written." It was *An Alabama Student*. That night, alone at The Clifford, and examining my treasure-trove of reprints, I read for the first time that charming essay, and caught in its familiar opening words a glimmering of insight into the simplicity of thought and springs of action of one, the secret of whose greatness lay in the fact, that in a widely different age and scene, he was still, as it were, The Servant in the House, and the prototype of the followers of the divine Physician of whom he speaks.

"Chief among the hard sayings of the Gospels," it begins, "is the declaration, He that loveth father or mother, or son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Yet the spirit that made possible its acceptance and which is responsible for Christianity as it is, or rather, perhaps, as it was, is the same which in all ages has compelled men to follow ideals, even at the sacrifice of the near and dear ones at home. In varied tones, to all at one time or another, the call comes: to one, to forsake all, and follow Him; to another, to scorn delight and live the laborious days of a student; to the third, to renounce all in the life of a Sunnyside. Many are the wand-bearers, few are the mystics, as the old Greek has it, or in the words which we know better, many are called but few are chosen. The gifts were diversified, but the same spirit inspired the flaming heart of St. Theresa, the patient soul of Palissey the potter, and the mighty intellect of John Hunter."

Dinner over, the great experience of the evening came, for this was one of Dr. Osler's students' nights, in which I had been invited to participate. Seated at the head of the long dinner-table, now

covered with a dark cloth, with nine young men and three women ranged around it and me beside him at the end, and with a little pile of books before him, he began by introducing four rare editions from the classics of medicine to his hearers, with a few wise words of appreciation on each. Then followed a delightful talk upon points of interest or difficulty in the week's work, for these were all his clinical clerks, the reporters of cases in his hospital service. "Well, Miss —, what is your trouble this week?" he began. "And yours?" turning to another. And then, as I sat there with heart beating at the wonderful new world that had opened so unexpectedly before me, he turned suddenly upon me, "I wonder, now, if you realize what an opportunity *you* have? That McGill museum is a great place. As soon as you go home look up the *British Medical Journal* for 1893, and read the article by Mr. Jonathan Hutchinson on 'A Clinical Museum'.* That is what he calls his museum in London and it is the greatest place I know for teaching students in. Pictures of life and death together. Wonderful. You read it and see what you can do." And so he gently dropped a seed that dominated all my future work. This is but an illustration of how his influence worked in many lives.

The next episode came in the following year, that of 1899, when, in working over the collection, I came upon a remarkable three-chambered heart with pulmonary artery given off from a small supplementary chamber placed at the right upper angle of the common ventricle. No information about it seemed available, until I inquired of Dr. Osler, who immediately replied: "I remember the specimen you describe perfectly, and have often demonstrated it to the students. It was presented before the Edinburgh Medical Society by old Dr. Andrew Holmes, the first Dean of the Faculty, very many years ago, and you will find it reported in one of the early Edinburgh Journals." And I did find it, published with a fine copper-plate engraving of the heart and full clinical history and post-mortem findings, in the *Transactions of the Edinburgh Medico-Chirurgical Society* for 1823, the year in which the Medical Faculty of McGill had been organized, at which time it had been obtained by Dr. Holmes from an autopsy done by himself, in the presence of the other Founders of the school.†

*See The Clinical Museum: an Explanatory Address, by Jonathan Hutchinson, F.R.C.S., F.R.S., *British Medical Journal*, 1893, II, pp. 1295-1296.

†Museum notes, Cor Biatratrium Triloculare, by A. F. Holmes, M.D., *Transactions Edinburgh Medico-Chirurgical Society*, 1824, presented by Dr. Alison in 1823. Republished with biographical sketch by Maude E. Abbott, *Montreal Medical Journal*, 1899.

The renewal of Dr. Osler's active interest in the Museum may be said to date from this time, and a succession of kindly notes of help or encouragement began then, which culminated, in the years 1904 to 1906 in an active correspondence and substantial support, which it is my purpose to retail here.

A word upon the condition of the collection at this time is first necessary.

Up to the time of my appointment, the office of curator had been a purely voluntary one, so that the specimens had been placed on the shelves and had been cared for there chiefly by those who had a personal interest in them, and practically no cataloguing had been done. A bare title with the name of the donor, and sometimes the hospital reference, was the utmost information the museum presented. It became my task to assemble, from these various sources the archives of the collection, and I began by a search of the Montreal General Hospital Autopsy Records and of the contemporary Medical Journals, in which many of these specimens had been undoubtedly recorded.

The real interest of this search began with the discovery, among the Montreal General Hospital Records, of three volumes of Dr. Osler's own post-mortem notes. I shall never forget the impression which these clearly written pages and accurately portrayed descriptions, and above all, the exquisite orderliness of this, the unseen daily task of his youth, made upon me at this time. Genius was written broad upon these pages, and there is no joy given to us greater than that of the first moment of recognition of the Master mind.

Case after case was recorded here by the name or hospital number which the specimens bore and there were many others which apparently referred from the descriptions to specimens without reference. So also with the old journals, the *Transactions of the Medico-Chirurgical Society* and the *Montreal General Hospital Reports*, both of which were published as bound volumes under Dr. Osler's editorship, during the years of his Montreal period. All these were crowded both with the cases to which the numbers stated on the specimens referred and with others which from the descriptions were dubbed by us "possible cases", and which awaited Dr. Osler's confirmation when a chance visit from him might bring the opportunity.

In the spring of 1904 he came, for the first time in my curatorship. Five years had elapsed since I first saw him in Baltimore, and much progress had been made in the museum, for the Faculty

had actively supported its development, and the seed which he had himself implanted, of the value of correlating clinical data of importance with the findings shown by the pathological specimens had borne ample fruit. All the specimens of the old collection for which a reference had been obtained stood, with full clinical history inscribed upon its catalogue sheet, among the new material, and a plan of "collaboration with clinicians" had been evolved, under which the cataloguing of each section was being proceeded with under the revision and co-operation of the chiefs in medicine and surgery, as well as pathology, with whose help a short didactic introduction to each section, emphasizing the points of interest of the specimens, had been appended; and an active system of museum teaching had grown up, which owed its vitality largely to the correlation of the "clinical aspects" with the pathological features of the case.

The whole met with Dr. Osler's approval, and his enthusiasm was great over the fact that a catalogue of his own beloved specimens and of the older part of the collection was at last being placed on paper. His first impulse was to suggest that funds be provided for its immediate publication, and to say that he himself would like to be allowed to raise these by a circular letter to McGill graduates, which he subsequently sent out. Then, dropping into a chair, and fingering with tender affection the old autopsy books and journals, which, with the corresponding or "possible" specimens were ranged before him for his inspection or identification, he began rapidly eliminating uncertainties with characteristic running comments as he did so. "That fellow, now, I remember well," scribbling rapidly on the back of a card that belonged to a case of a large aneurism of the ascending arch of the aorta that was innocent of any trace of laminated clot, the so-called "healing" process, and which had ruptured into the right pleura. "It took a long while before the diagnosis was made, but he came back to the hospital at last with a pulsation in the second and third right interspace. So we put him to bed and tried to cure him with big doses of Pot. Iodid. He got 120 grains a day, and our efforts were crowned with success, for the pulsation had disappeared. We were talking of discharging him in triumph when one day he died suddenly, and we found—*that!*" "And this," seizing suddenly upon a small unlabelled specimen which had completely mystified me, for it represented a small piece of a quite healthy thoracic aorta with a round hole in its wall leading into a sac, the size of a tangerine orange, which lay between it and the œsophagus,

and opened into this by a small jagged tear. "This is that extraordinary case of mycotic aneurism of the aorta rupturing into the oesophagus. She died suddenly without any warning at all. It is reported in the *International Clinics*. There is a beautiful coloured frontispiece of it done by old Mr. Raphael. Have you any other cases of mycotic aneurism to go along with this?—Oh that one, that's a new specimen, magnificent—whose is it—McCrae's I say McCrae," turning to Dr. John McCrae who stood among the little throng of chosen ones who were following him in his peregrinations through college and hospital, "you'll report this case, won't you? It will be one of the best cases in the literature." And John McCrae did report it.*

The same running commentary with dictated or scribbled notes upon the points of interest which attracted him, went on not only through the rest of that morning but through many subsequent visits, of hours' duration, which he paid both that summer and in January, 1905, when he was in Montreal sitting for his Harris' portrait, and again in July and August of 1905 when he was staying at Murray Bay on his second return visit to America, from Oxford.

His interest took the practical form, too, of raising, in the autumn of 1904, by means of a printed circular issued by himself to McGill graduates and their friends, funds for the publication of the first part of the catalogue, and himself revising every sheet of that portion of it then being prepared for the press, and finally in supervising, in the year 1914, the publication of the first volume by the Oxford University Press. More than forty letters written by him during the year 1904-1907 on these subjects have fortunately been preserved, and, with the notes inscribed by him on the manuscript of the catalogue, remain to attest these activities. Always short and to the point, overflowing with his lively and persistent interest in all that had once attracted his observation, and with the encouragement and the stimulating suggestions with which he invariably directed the energies of the younger generation to fresh sources of information and research, these letters form an eminently characteristic record. A short quotation here must suffice. "I see you have a specimen of calcification of the pericardium. It would be well to speak of it in the introduction. There is a very good article two or three years ago in the *Pathological Society's Transactions*." "I have read the Endocardium section with the greatest interest. Some-

* "A case of Mycotic Aneurism of the Aorta with Malignant Endocarditis," by John McCrae, M.D., M.R.C.P., *Journal of Pathology and Bacteriology*, 1905.

thing should be said of fetal endocarditis, just to clear the minds of the students."

The veil, by which intimacy of contact and innate modesty of heart screens the personality of the truly great from the full vision of their contemporaries, has been lifted for us now by the hand of death, and we see Sir William Osler among those whom Carlyle has called the heroes of the race. His exact position in the history of medicine is for posterity to adjudge; but the revelations made by his pioneer work in pathological anatomy as shown in his collections and early publications, and his perennial interest in the facts of nature which this work had declared to his searching gaze, yields no uncertain forecast. Where the palm is given to versatility of genius and power of its expression, unflinching accuracy of observation, instantaneous recognition and correlation of significant data, and that all-embracing creative faculty which forms, out of the multitudinous details of a crowded experience, new, fresh, and clear concepts of humanitarian value,—*there* the name of William Osler will be written large, beside that of Rudolph Virchow, the apostle of his youth, and Jonathan Hutchinson, the enthusiasm of his maturer years.

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