THE LINACRE, HARVEY, AND SYDENHAM TRIPTYCH

N THE OSLER LIBRARY AT McGill University portraits of Thomas Linacre, William Harvey, and Thomas Sydenham hang in a triple frame. Their history goes back a century to December 19, 1876 when Dr. Samuel W. Gross, son of Dr. S.D. Gross the doyen of American surgeons, married Miss Grace Revere. Five years later the young couple represented the elder Dr. Gross at the Seventh International Medical Congress in London and were feted everywhere, staying in London with the President, Sir James Paget, in his Regent's Park house, and attending a dinner at which were present the Prince and Princess of Wales and their nephew, the future German Emperor. After the Congress were present the Prince and Princess of Wales and their Regent's Park house, and attending a dinner at which there were copies of Linacre, Harvey, and Sydenham which once adorned William Osler's library first in Baltimore and later in Oxford. At the request of the Editorial Committee Dr. A.H.T. Robb-Smith has traced the history of this triptych and the results of his research are published in this Newsletter.

One of the treasured possessions of the Osler Library is the set of portraits of Linacre, Harvey, and Sydenham which once adorned William Osler's library first in Baltimore and later in Oxford. At the request of the Editorial Committee Dr. A.H.T. Robb-Smith has traced the history of this triptych and the results of his research are published in this Newsletter.

In 1894 it was young Professor Osler from Johns Hopkins and his wife who were calling on Sir Henry Acland, now nearly 80. It was Osler's first visit to Oxford. He had come to England to attend the Bristol meeting of the British Medical Association as well as that of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. On entering Sir Henry Acland's library he looked up at the portraits in the triple frame that his wife had seen about a dozen years before and exclaimed with delight. Indeed he made such a doo-do about them that Mrs. Osler subsequently asked Sir Henry if they might be copied as a birthday present for her husband. So it was that the 'triptych' came to adorn Osler's libraries in Baltimore and Oxford, "for though his teacher Burdon Sanderson came between, it would almost seem as though Acland had knowingly handed on an emblem of the Regius Professorship to the man destined, in the whirligig of time and place, to become his successor". These are the portraits that hang in the Osler Library at McGill University and we can only add a little to their history and that of the originals from which they were derived.

It has been suggested that the idea of this triumvirate came from Dr. Richard Quain's proposal that three niches in the portico of the Pall Mall building of the Royal College of Physicians of London should be filled with statues of Linacre, Harvey, and Sydenham. These were carved by Henry Weekes and put in position in 1876, but the evidence would suggest that Acland's portraits preceded this and were more likely an act of filial piety to the college which had elected him a fellow in 1842, for Linacre and Sydenham had both been fellows of All Souls, while Harvey had been Warden of Merton College, to which the Linacre lecturers were attached.

It would take too long in this article to describe in detail the originals from which Acland's portraits were derived but a full account has been deposited in the Osler Library. It must suffice here to state that the Linacre is a copy of a portrait in Windsor Castle which has been in the Royal Collection since early in the seventeenth century, but it was not until 1734 that it was acclaimed as a representation by Quintin Matsys of Thomas Linacre, though modern art critics question both attributions. The portrait of Thomas Sydenham is based on an engraving by Jakob Houbraken of a lost painting said to have been by Sir Peter Lely and formerly in the possession of John Sydenham, the physician's grandson. The Harvey is certainly derived from the so-called official portrait in the Royal College of Physicians which was formerly attributed to Cornelius Johnson (Janssen) but is now considered to be by some unknown artist and perhaps painted posthumously. It will be convenient to trace the history of the Acland portraits first and then turn to the copies made for the Oslers.

Sir Henry Acland died on October 16th, 1900, at the age of 85, but his affairs had long been in order and in a codicil...
to his will, dated March 14th, 1893, he bequeathed to the University of Oxford, an astronomical clock, John Hunter's chair, and "The portraits of Sydenham, Linacre and Harvey in one frame to be kept in the room at the Museum of the Regius Professor of Medicine." Osler, as the Regius Professor, inherited this room. He wrote in 1905 "I have very nice official rooms at the Museum, with two laboratory rooms attached, ..." It was there that he found the three portraits which had thrilled him on his first visit to Oxford eleven years before. Appropriately Dr. T.D. Acland, Sir Henry's son, in his contribution on "The Oxford University Museum" in the Festschrift for Osler's 70th birthday wrote "Literae - Scientia - Praxis. So runs the legend inscribed beneath the portraits of three distinguished sons of Oxford in the Regius professor's room at the University Museum. The portraits were a legacy from Sir Henry Acland ..."

But it is curious that neither Sir Henry in his will nor Dr. Acland in this article were concerned as to the correct order in which the portraits were arranged in the frame.

In 1954 the Regius Professor relinquished the last of his rooms in the Museum for which Sir Henry Acland had fought so hard a century before. Two years later Sir George Pickering became the first Regius, since Osler, to reside in 13 Norham Gardens. Acland's triptych was moved to 13 Norham Gardens where it now hangs in the Regius Professor's office over the maple wood mantelpiece made from doors in Dr. S.D. Gross' home in Philadelphia and brought by the Oslers to Baltimore and thence to Oxford. This office was formerly Lady Osler's drawing room and her carpet is still on the floor.

Reverting to Osler's visit to Oxford in 1894, he and his wife were back in Baltimore by October 1st and on November 14th, Osler was writing to Sir Henry Acland "If the Artist has finished copying the portraits would you kindly ask him to have them framed and lettered and then carefully packed and forwarded to the above address. Let him send a memorandum of all expenses to me and I will remit at once by draft." Although impossible to prove, I think that the unnamed artist made two copies of the triptych, one of which was Mrs. Osler's birthday present for her husband, the other to be Professor Osler's gift to the William Pepper Laboratory of Clinical Medicine at Philadelphia, though the Philadelphia set might have been painted later.

Pepper, as Osler recalled, had been well grounded in morbid anatomy in which he made some important contributions but initially he had little interest in clinical pathology, though he did provide two small laboratories, primarily intended for chemical tests, under the new lecture theatre which was built in 1872 for the Philadelphia University Hospital. It was Osler's arrival in 1884 that turned one of these rooms into a clinical research laboratory with "an atmosphere so encouraging and helpful that young fellows trooped to his side." Ten years later Dr. Pepper, now Provost of the University, proposed the creation of a Laboratory of Clinical Medicine — in fact clinical research — in memory of his father and to the design of Dr. John Shaw Billings, at that time Director of the Hospital as well as Professor of Hygiene.

Osler would certainly have heard of these proposals when he delivered his address 'The Leaven of Science' at the opening of the Wistar Institute of Anatomy in Philadelphia on May 21, 1894, and so it is not surprising that when he saw, only two months later, Sir Henry Acland's triptych of the three physicians — scholar, clinician, and experimentalist — he felt it would form an ideal emblem for what was to be the first clinical research laboratory to be built in the United States; so it was that two copies of the Acland triptych were made, one for Osler himself and one for the Pepper Laboratory.

Despite a thorough search of the Pepper manuscripts, it has not been possible to determine when the portraits were received in Philadelphia, but it must have been sometime in 1896, as on January 13th, 1897, Osler was answering Pepper's enquiry as to their provenance. He wrote "Drummond has sent me word with reference to the pictures. The Linacre was copied from the painting by Holbein; Sydenham from the one by Sir Peter Lely; Harvey from the painting by Cornelius Jansen [Janssen] in the College of Physicians."

It is possible that Drummond was the artist who made the copies for Osler and it could be Julian Drummond, who helped Acland with his drawings and diagrams and later became Artist to the Radcliffe Library. Another but less likely possibility is that Osler had consulted Sir George Drummond (1829-1910), the Scottish Canadian financier and art collector.
The Pepper Laboratory has more than fulfilled the high aspirations of its founder. In 1928, a nine storey Martin Maloney Memorial Clinic replaced the old building. The Pepper Laboratory is housed on the seventh floor and the original entrance door has been preserved, while a terracotta frieze from the north face of the old building was let into the wall of the corridor of the present laboratory. Beneath this frieze are several portraits and in pride of place is the triptych of Linacre, Sydenham, and Harvey that Osler presented eighty years ago. It is an exact facsimile of Sir Henry Acland's set as to size, arrangement, framing and lettering, the only difference being a narrow carved floral scroll above the frame which is not present on the Acland original and so far as can be seen from photographs was lacking in 1890. On the back of each canvas is stamped "Prepared by Winsor and Newton, Limited, 36, Rathbone Place, London, W. 237403," and written on the frames are the numbers '268' [Linacre], '269' [Sydenham], '270' [Harvey]. Enquiries from Messrs. Winsor and Newton revealed that the wording of the stamp was that in use by the company between 1882 and 1900, that the number 237403 gave no useful information and that the firm would merely have supplied the canvasses to the artist, but would have no concern with the framing.

Returning once more to Osler's own copy of the triptych, it will be recalled that the seventeenth chapter of Harvey Cushing's biography of Osler is headed "1897-8. Letters, Science, and Practice" and starts "Litterae: Scientia: Praxis. This was the legend inscribed under the panel of Linacre, Harvey, and Sydenham, his chief medical heroes, which by now had come from Acland to adorn his library mantel. There was something of each of them in his composition, and a future panel could well include Osler himself, with the addition of DOCTRINA in its legend ..." Benjamin Spector wrote a delightful essay on Osler with this title, illustrated by a photograph of the portraits over the portal of the Osler Library in the McGill Strathcona Medical Building.9

Curiously enough no photograph is known of Osler's library at West Franklin Street in Baltimore and so we cannot be sure how the portraits were framed or arranged there. Later when Osler moved to Oxford and the oak lined library of 13 Norham Gardens was complete and the shelves ready to receive their books, the overmantel had been specially designed to accommodate the three portraits and now there is no doubt as to the arrangement – Linacre, Harvey, Sydenham.

After Lady Osler's death on August 31st, 1928, "The Open Arms" became a ghost home, as room after room was emptied of its books, exposing the empty oak or white painted shelves. The house and certain of its contents had been bequeathed by Lady Osler to Christ Church for the benefit of the Regius Professor in the hope that it would become his residence. Sir Farquhar Buzzard had succeeded Sir Archibald Garrod as Regius in 1927 and had a home in Banbury Road, but it was not until early in December 1928 that it was learnt that he did not propose to move into 13 Norham Gardens and so on December 4th, 1928 Dr. Francis wrote to Dr. C.F. Martin, Dean of the McGill Medical Faculty, "The new Regius has just decided that he cannot take over this house, so there is a lot more to be disposed of which was meant to stay in it. Probably the portraits (copies in oils) of Linacre, Harvey and Sydenham, will now come to the [Osler] Library – whether they can be hung in the room I don’t know." In 1949 I had a letter from Dr. Francis in which he told me that before he left for Montreal, he "wrenched the three pictures out of the library mantelpiece (with the consent of the Executors)" but the Report of the Librarian (W.W. Francis) to the Curators of the Osler Library of June 25th, 1930, states more urbanely that the portraits of Linacre, Harvey, and Sydenham (framed together) were received from Mrs. H.B. Chapin, Lady Osler's sister and executrix, and were hung in the Library. They were framed, maintaining Osler's sequence of Linacre, Harvey, Sydenham by Eglintons Ltd., of 1468 Mansfield Street, Montreal, and were hung over the lintel of the entrance to the Osler Library in the Strathcona Medical Building. Then in 1965 they were moved to the Osler Library's new quarters in the McIntyre Building.

These notes could not have been written without assistance from many people but I am particularly indebted to Dr. E.H. Bensley of the Department of the History of Medicine, McGill University, Miss Marilyn Fransiszyn of the Osler Library, and Professor H.M. Rawnsley and Mr. Francis Dallett of the University of Pennsylvania. The letter from Osler to Sir Henry Acland is quoted by kind permission of Bodley's Librarian.

References


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THE FRANCIS WING

Through the generosity of a Friend of the Osler Library, and with additional funds from McGill University, the long-awaited and much-needed Francis Wing of the Osler Library will become a reality in the near future. When completed, the new Wing — named after the first Osler Librarian, W.W. Francis — will provide enlarged and enhanced shelving for rare and circulating books, a staff lounge, and additional office, seminar, and study space for the Department of the History of Medicine. Plans for the construction are well under way, and construction should follow soon upon their completion. Details of the new Wing will appear in the Newsletter sometime after the completion of the work.

VISITORS

Towards the end of August the Osler Library was visited by The Chinese Friendship Delegation led by Mr. Chang Chih-chiang, Vice-Minister of Public Health, People’s Republic of China. The Delegation was accompanied by His Excellency Mr. Chang Wen-chin, Ambassador to Canada from the People’s Republic. At the conclusion of the visit, the Vice-Minister presented to the Osler Library an elegant volume of pictures relating to Dr. Norman Bethune. The Delegation had come to Canada to attend the official opening on August 30th of the Bethune Memorial House, the restored birthplace in Gravenhurst, Ontario of Dr. Bethune.

Other recent visitors have included Dr. A.H.T. Robb-Smith, the author of the lead-article in this issue of the Newsletter, and Sir Richard and Lady Doll, the present occupants of The Open Arms, the Oxford home of Sir William and Lady Osler.

A GIFT FROM DR. HAROLD GRIFFITH

The Osler Library has received an important gift of books, journals, and manuscripts from Dr. Harold Griffith, Emeritus Professor of Anesthesia at McGill University and a former Medical Superintendent of the Montreal Homoeopathic Hospital (later re-named The Queen Elizabeth Hospital of Montreal). The gift included materials relating to two subjects, homeopathy and the introduction by Dr. Griffith of curare into clinical anesthesia as a muscle relaxant. Among the homeopathic materials were “The Minute Book of the Montreal Homoeopathic Association,” the “Register of the College of Homoeopathic Physicians and Surgeons of Montreal,” The Homoeopathic Messenger (1895-1904), the History of Homoeopathy in Montreal and the Statutes, Regulations and By-Laws of the Montreal Homoeopathic Association and its Subordinate Organizations (1895). The materials on curare included notes, records, letters, and manuscripts concerning Dr. Griffith’s use of curare in the early 1940’s.

FRIENDS OF THE OSLER LIBRARY

With this issue of the Newsletter, an appeal for funds for the 1976-77 academic year is launched by the Friends of the Osler Library. Friends who wish to contribute to this appeal are asked to fill in the enclosed pink form and to return it with their cheques to the designated address.

In addition to making possible the publication of the Newsletter, the contributions from the Friends have enabled the Osler Library to purchase on microfilm nearly all the books listed in Robert B. Austin’s Early American Medical Imprints: A Guide to Works Printed in the United States, 1668-1820 (Washington: U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Public Health Service, 1961). These 1600 titles will add depth to the Library’s collections.
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