OSLER LIBRARY NEWSLETTER

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THE *ENCYCLOPÉDIE* IN THE OSLER LIBRARY

The Pyramide du Louvre. The Opéra de la Bastille. The *grand défilé du quatorze juillet*. And now, even a *très grande bibliothèque*! The bicentennial of the French Revolution has certainly been an event punctuated by magnificent gestures in the Gallic manner; even the media hype has been on a scale that can only be measured by Napoleonic standards of *gloire*. Happily, the spirit of the *bicentenaire* also seems to be mildly contagious, and a case was reported this summer in the Osler Library. Dr H. Rocke Robertson, a former principal of McGill University, a member of the Osler Library's Board of Curators, and a benefactor of long standing in whose honour our rare books room was named, presented the Library with a complete first edition of the *Encylopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* of Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert.

The Diderot-d'Alembert *Encyclopédie* is one of the most famous publishing ventures in history, and its reputation is justified on many grounds. In terms of its physical size and the scope of its contents, it represents a quantum leap from its predecessors. Thirty-five folio volumes – seventeen of text, eleven of plates, followed by a five-volume supplement and two volumes of tables – were printed in Paris, Neuchâtel (ostensibly) and Amsterdam between 1751 and 1780. The contents cover every conceivable subject from metaphysics to wig-making, and the illustrations constitute an unparalleled visual archive of the arts, sciences, manufactures and material culture of the eighteenth century. The copy presented to the Osler Library by Dr Robertson is in extraordinarily fine condition, with all its plates intact; such sets are now quite rare and valuable.

Dr Robertson's interest in the *Encyclopédie* grew out of his broader interest in the history of lexicography, for in the annals of dictionary-making, the *Encyclopédie* holds a special place. Its beginnings were modest, and even derivative: a project launched in 1745 to produce a French translation of Chambers' *Cyclopaedia*. After a few false starts, the venture was confided to Diderot and d'Alembert, who promptly enlarged its scope. In fact the new editors, and Diderot in particular, radically redefined the nature of the encyclopaedia. Instead of a closed and finite "circle of knowledge" set out along rational lines laid down *a priori* by a philosophical or religious world-view, the *Encyclopédie* would present a concept of knowledge conditioned by a theory of scientific progress. This new encyclopaedia was to be a sort of progress report on man's continual conquest of a universe of infinite knowledge; hence it was fitting that it be organized alphabetically, ostensibly for ease of reference, but also to underscore its provisional character. Progress was also the purpose of the *Encyclopédie*: the encouragement of progress in the arts and sciences, to be sure, but beneath this veneer of edification and usefulness, the encouragement of progress in other, and wider, spheres.

For in a sense the *Encyclopédie*, despite its alphabetical organization, is *raisonné* by virtue of the topics selected for coverage, and by virtue of the extensive system of cross-references. Cross-references allowed discrete articles to be linked together, but they also played an interesting subsidiary role by permitting the editors to make subtle political and ideological statements. A sly cross-reference, for instance, could mask a jibe at religion, or a criticism of political authority, particularly if it lead from one appartently innocuous heading to another. But the *Encyclopédie*'s fundamental emphasis on progress was in itself a resounding proclamation of its hostility to everything that seemed to stand in the path of progress in eighteenth century France: superstition, privilege, absolutism, ignorance. The article in the *Encyclopédie* on "Encyclopédie" sets forth these principles with great clarity. A true *encyclopédie* was not a static catalogue of authoritative knowledge, but a barometer of knowledge in the making, to be constantly revised as knowledge was enlarged and refined. Moreover, the *encyclopédie* represented knowledge for everyone, a "capital for humanity" rather than the possession of a privileged class of clerks.

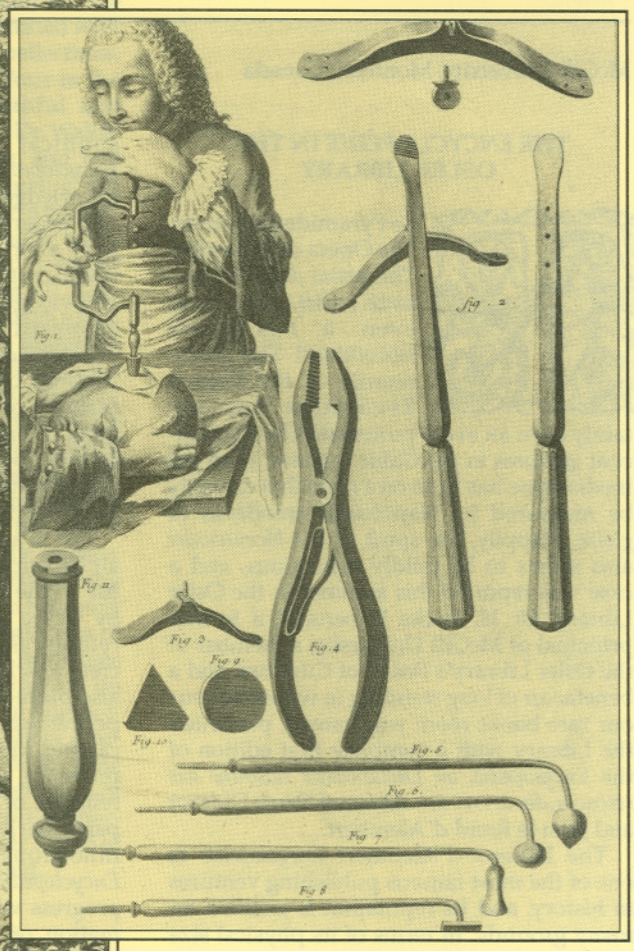
Little wonder, therefore, that the *Encyclopédie* and its editors came in for much unwelcome attention from the authorities. Hardly had the second volume left the press in 1752 than the Royal Council, alarmed at the free-thinking tendencies broadcast on nearly every page, forbade further publication. But the subscribers quadrupled in the first seven years, though they often had to purchase their copies under the counter. When the royal privilege of publication was formally rescinded in 1759, the publishers were ordered to cease operations and reimburse the subscribers, but not a single subscriber claimed his money back – a striking indication of the climate of opinion of the time, which the government might have been wise to heed. By feigning to shift their presses to Neuchâtel in Switzerland, and later by unfeignedly removing to Amsterdam, the editors succeeded in completing the massive work by 1780, a bare nine years before the Revolution whose seeds they had helped to sow burst forth upon the world.

Much of the historical impact of the *Encyclopédie* rests upon the quality and importance of the stable of contributors assembled by Diderot. Buffon was engaged to write on natural history, Jean-Jacques Rousseau on political philosophy, d'Holbach on chemistry, Turgot on economics, Voltaire on literature. Amongst these one finds a considerable number of medical men, though not always assigned to the anticipated subjects. A Monsieur Daubenton, M.D. was in charge of the entire natural history section of the enterprise. François Quesnay, though a surgeon, was better known as a writer on economics, on which subject he contributed a number of articles. As for the medical portion proper, it was under the direct supervision of Diderot himself, who prepared the translations from Robert James' *Medicinal Dictionary* (London, 1743-1745) that are the basis of many of the minor articles. The main articles on "Médecine". "Matière médicale" and "Pharmacie" were written by a comparative non-entity named Urbain de Vandenesse; save that he was a regent of the Faculté de Médecine in Paris, we know almost nothing about him, not even the year of his death. But when it came to surgery, the editors of the *Encyclopédie* found themselves a contributor of the very first rank: Antoine Louis, perpetual secretary of the Académie Royale de Chirurgie and the most eminent practitioner of his day. Louis was a prolific author in his own right, particularly in his special field of legal medicine, but he penned enough in the way of articles for Diderot's *Encyclopédie* to fill a two-volume "spin-off" of his own, the *Dictionnaire de chirurgie* (Paris, 1772).

That the editors should have chosen their surgical author with such care is entirely consonant with their liberal and progressive philosophy. Their eleven volumes of plates, detailing every tool and every operation of dozens of crafts and manufactures, proclaim the ideal of democratic and useful knowledge, and by implication criticize mere bookish erudition and learned privilege. The surgeon, long the social and scientific subordinate of the physician, emerges as the true high priest of the medical art in the allegorical frontispiece to the surgical plates (ill. 1). In the foreground of this Arcadian scene is an ailing tree. The naked lady pruning away the dead branches, according to

The initial letter on this page is reproduced from Alexander Nesbitt (ed.) *Decorative alphabets and initials*, plate 75, Dover Publications, 1959.

Figure 1. (left) Allegory of Surgery.
Frontispiece of the surgery section of the third volume of the *Recueil des planches of the Encyclopédie* (Paris, 1763)
Figure 2. (below) Petit's elevator, with improved cross-piece designed by Antoine Louis, is depicted in figs. 2-3 of Pl. XVII.



the helpful accompanying text, is Surgery. Behind her is a statue of Aesculapius with his sacrificial animals, the cock and the crow. Two *putti* gather and crush herbs, while a third draws medicinal gum from a tree. In the background, another *putto*, symbolizing orthopaedics, props up a tree. In short, the scene is wholly dominated by Lady Surgery; medicine, relegated to an icon, melts into the background, while the lively pharmaceutical and mechanical crafts play explicitly auxiliary roles.

The heart of surgery's prestige, in the view of the *Encyclopédie*, is its practical effectiveness, and hence its evident capacity for progress. Thus the plates are overwhelmingly devoted to the armamentarium of surgery, and particular stress is laid on technical advances. Our illustration 2 shows elevators designed by Petit, with details of improvements made by Louis himself. The editors' self-conscious mission to sweep away ignorance, fear and mystification is superbly illustrated by a detailed sequence of step-by-step engravings of lithotomy, itself a *tour de force* of medical illustration. The whole set of plates is illuminated by an explanatory key decked out with cross-references to dozens of articles, enabling the reader to re-construct an entire text-book of surgery from the scattered entries of the *Encyclopédie*.

Medicine and surgery, however, occupy only a small portion of the contents of the *Encyclopédie*, and are not the subjects upon which its historic renown is based. Why, then, does the *Encyclopédie* belong in the Osler Library? The answer is two-fold. First, Sir William Osler's plan for his Library always stressed the scientific context of medicine, and he took pains to acquire many important works in the history of science which have no medical content at all, such as Copernicus' *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (*Bibl. Osl.* 566) and Newton's *Principia mathematica* (*Bibl. Osl.* 1024). Secondly, Osler also selected certain pivotal works in the general realm of philosophy or intellectual history which he felt should be on the shelves of any serious library devoted to recording the development of the human spirit of inquiry. His copies of Plato and Aristotle might be said to fall in this category. Diderot, of course, is not to be compared to Plato, but the spirit that his *Encyclopédie* distilled and promoted was one destined to transform medical knowledge and medical practice in the following century. This of itself wins for the *Encyclopédie* an honourable place amongst the *subsidia scientifica* of the Osler Library, and for Dr. Robertson, our sincere and profound gratitude.

Faith Wallis

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ANOTHER LETTER FROM EDITH WHARTON TO SIR WILLIAM OSLER

In *Osler Library Newsletter* no. 57 (February 1988), I published, in collaboration with Blake Gopnik, a preliminary report on "Finding Osler's Letters in the Osler Library". By way of illustrating the kind of exciting discoveries that our Osler Letters Inventory Project had engendered, I reproduced two hitherto unpublished letters to Osler from the American novelist Edith Wharton which shed precious light on her role in Henry James' famous illness of 1909-1910.

Osler's involvement in James' case is well known from Leon Edel's biography of James, and has recently been the subject of a fascinating article by Henry D. Janowitz and Adeline R. Tintner entitled "An Anglo-American Consultation: Sir William Osler Refers Henry James to Sir James Mackenzie", and published in *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 43 (July 1988):297-308. Janowitz and Tintner demonstrate that James, despite his hypochondria and bad nerves, was probably suffering from coronary heart disease, as he himself suspected. Osler undoubtedly deduced this from James' written description of his symptoms, and consequently suggested that James consult Mackenzie, the leading cardiologist of the day, which James duly did. Mackenzie, of course, knew that nothing could be done, but was also aware that James' nervous tension was likely to exacerbate his condition. James sunk further and further into melancholy. It was at this point, in the spring of 1910, that his old friend Edith Wharton surreptitiously approached Osler and asked if she could bear the expenses of a special house-call on James by the Regius Professor. Edith Wharton's offer turned out to be unnecessary, as the James family had already contrived to bring Henry James to London for an appointment with Osler. However, it opened the door to a friendly acquaintance between Edith Wharton and Osler himself. She sent him *Artemis to Acteon*, and he promised to present her with *Michael Servetus* as soon as it was off the presses. In this way, Osler tactfully transformed a somewhat formal and embarrassed relationship of dependence into a gentle friendship.

Janowitz and Tintner were not aware of Edith Wharton's involvement, which indeed was only made manifest when the newly-discovered letters were printed in the February 1988 *Newsletter*. While her part in the story does not modify their central argument, it certainly demonstrates how deeply James' family and circle were disturbed by his condition, and how thoroughly convinced they were of its psychological origin. This is reinforced by another Wharton letter recently discovered in the "Osler Papers" (Osler Library Archives, Accession 326). This letter is in fact a sequel to the two published in my first article. As she promised in her letter of March 11, 1910, Mrs. Wharton did come over from Paris to see Henry James in London. She was on her way back in Paris on March 24, when she wrote the following to Sir William Osler.

Folkestone, March 24, 19[10]

Dear Dr. Osler,

Your note of the 17th was forwarded to me from Paris a few days ago, as I had meanwhile come over to London to see Mr. James, & find out if I could be of any use after Harry James's [Henry James' nephew, son of his brother William] departure. Now that a strict rest cure has been decided on, I have become superfluous, & shall merely wait here over Easter, & then go back to Paris.

I hope "Servetus" is waiting for me there. He had not arrived when I left. If we are in England later I shall venture to remind you of your invitation to Oxford.

Meanwhile, thank you for writing – & please remember that if I can be of use later, I can always dash over for a few days. Mr. James is fond of me, & knows that I don't mind sudden "displacements", so my coming would not worry him.

Sincerely yours

Edith Wharton.

Again, Osler's side of the correspondence is missing, but it is plain that he wrote to reassure Edith Wharton, and to take the edge off her awkwardness at having approached him in this manner by inviting her, in his usual open manner, to drop into 13 Norham Gardens. Evidently as well, Mackenzie and Osler kept the true diagnosis of James' condition between themselves, for the "rest cure" was a therapy for stress. As Janowitz and Tintner point out, however, such professional reserve was normal, and indeed beneficial, for in the absence of beta-blockers and bypass surgery, the very best that the medical art could do was to try to slow James down and cheer him up.

Faith Wallis

THE FRIENDS OF THE OSLER LIBRARY: A REPORT AND AN APPEAL

Autumn is a season of harvest and thanksgiving, and the fall issue of the *Osler Library Newsletter* is always a welcome opportunity to review the harvest of projects made possible by the Friends of the Osler Library, and to thank them for their support. The harvest this year is an exceptionally varied one, and as usual, the major "crop" is one of books. The most interesting and valuable of the many volumes purchased with Friends' funds this year are a group of outstanding historical reference works. The four massive folio volumes of Johannes Jacobus Mangetus' *Bibliotheca scriptorum medicorum veterum et recentiorum* published in Geneva by Perachon and Cramer in 1731 comprise detailed bio-bibliographies of hundreds of medical writers, including reviews of their works, and even articles contributed to periodicals. Manget (1652-1742), who was dean of the medical faculty at Geneva and later personal physician to the king of Prussia, channelled most of his creative energies into producing bibliographies; these are of considerable value now, as many of the works to which they refer are rare, or have even disappeared. Closely akin to bibliographies are catalogues of historic libraries, and of these the Friends have added to our shelves *A Catalogue of the genuine and truly valuable Library of the very learned Dr. Joseph Letherland*, printed in London in 1765, and describing a rather wonderful library of science and medicine. Letherland, who had died the previous year, was a man of many accomplishments, a physician to the Queen, and still remembered for his description of diphtheria. We have also acquired two rare 19th century catalogues of the Académie royale de Médecine de Belgique, as well as the first edition of Kurt Sprengel's *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Medizin* (Halle, 1794-96), and the three volumes of Flores' *Historia de la medicine en Mexico desde la epoca de los Indios hasta la presente* (Mexico City, 1886-88), the first, and still most comprehensive, history of Mexican medicine.

The Friends have also assisted us in preserving our historic collections by making possible the purchase of acid-free boxes and leather restorer for bindings. Their donations also contribute towards the cataloguing of these works by our rare books consultant cataloguer, Tamara Seni, and for their appraisal by qualified experts. The Friends of the Osler Library also represent the Library in similar organizations at other institutions, such as the Canadian Friends of the Bodleian Library, and the Friends of the Archives and Special Collections on Women in Medicine at the Medical College of Pennsylvania. Last February, the History of Medicine Librarian's participation in a conference on medieval medicine at the University of Toronto was underwritten by the Friends. So are dozens of other projects large and small, ranging from a new printer for the office computer, to special literature racks for the Wellcome Camera. The Friends take a special responsibility for the Library's

public programmes and public character by sponsoring the publicity for special events, financing receptions (such as the one held last October to celebrate the arrival of the French theses), and of course, printing the *Osler Library Newsletter*.

It is plain that the Osler Library has much to thank its Friends for, and this annual autumnal rite is one that we fulfil with particular pleasure this year. Your continued confidence in the Library, its programmes and goals, is deeply appreciated. With this issue of the *Newsletter*, we formally launch our appeal for donations for the 1989-1990 period. Your renewed support of the Osler Library through its Friends will make possible new seedtimes and harvests in the months to come.

Faith Wallis

N.B. Donations to the Friends of the Osler Library received since June 1989 will be recorded in the February 1990 *Newsletter*.

A GIFT IDEA FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON

Enclosed with this issue of the *Newsletter*, our regular subscribers will find an attractive bookmark advertising *Bibliotheca Osleriana*, the catalogue of Sir William Osler's Library originally published by Oxford University Press in 1929, re-issued in a second edition in 1969, and recently re-printed (see *Osler Library Newsletter* no. 57, February 1988). A copy of the *Bibliotheca* would make a superb Christmas or Hannukah gift for a physician or student of medical history. And when the holidays are over, there are always graduations, birthdays, anniversaries.... Copies of *Bibliotheca Osleriana* are available for purchase from the Library at a regular price of $140 (Canadian)/$110 (U.S.), or a special Friends price of $125 (Canadian)/$95 U.S. Orders may be sent directly to the Osler Library, 3655 Drummond St., Montreal, Quebec, Canada H3G 1Y6.

FRIDAYS AT FOUR IN THE OSLER LIBRARY

During the 1988-1989 academic year, Dr. Faith Wallis presented for the first time a regular series of informal talks about the history of science and medicine, illustrated with works from the Osler Library's collections. This series, entitled "Fridays at Four in the Osler Library", attracted a faithful and enthusiastic group of participants. Dr. Wallis' "Fridays" will continue this year, and will concentrate on two themes. During the autumn, she will continue last year's presentations on Renaissance encyclopaedic mentalities by looking at Robert Fludd (October 20) and Conrad Gesner (November 17). Robert Fludd is a "re-run" of last February's talk, which had to be cancelled due to illness. In the new year, Fridays at Four will turn to a new theme: the face. From classical Antiquity up the beginning of this century, the visible aspect of the human face has been a considered a major indicator of psychological character. Reflections on how the face reveals the soul – and even the maladies of the soul – nourished three branches of early science. The elaborate ancient lore of physiognomy will be presented on January 12. On February 7, Dr. Wallis will explore the obscurities of metoposcopy, the art of divination from lines upon the face. The series will wind up on March 16 with a panoramic view of phrenology, the science of cranial bumps, now thoroughly discredited, but which in its time played a particular role in the emergence of psychiatry. The sessions are on Friday afternoons at 4 p.m., in the historic Osler Room of the Osler Library, and all are invited.

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