LYMAN POWELL, WILLIAM OSLER, AND OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

Sir William Osler's magnum opus, The Principles and Practice of Medicine, is a classic authored textbook. Nevertheless, he freely acknowledged the help of numerous colleagues in the preparation of the first edition of 1892. In a prefatory note Osler offers thanks to his residents Henry A. Lafleur and William S. Thayer, the latter assisting in the section on Blood Disease; to D. Meredith Reed, soon to die of the disease, for the statistics on tuberculosis; and to Henry M. Thomas for his help with the sections on Nervous Disease and Topical Diagnosis. He also extends his gratitude to his secretary Miss B.O. Humpton and to Lyman P. Powell "of the Johns Hopkins University for a careful revision of the manuscript." In all of Osler's writings, Powell's name appears only once more in an annotation in the Bibliotheca Osleriana describing the writing of the textbook:

"... I had arranged to send MS. by July 1st [1891], and on that date I forwarded five sections, but the publishers did not begin to print until the middle of August. The first two examples of a single section, in August 1891, I spent in Toronto, and... I practically finished the manuscript by about October 15th. During the summer the entire manuscript was carried about and stooping over until his fingers all but touched the floor. Then the memorable lines:

'Has there any old fellow got mixed with the boys? If there has, take him out, without making a noise. Hang the Almanac's cheat and the Catalogue's spite! Old Time is a liar! We're twenty tonight!' (6)

While the precise date of this visit with Holmes is not known, it may possibly be associated with the vain call that Osler received from Boston in May 1891 to assume the vacant Chair of the Theory and Practice of Physic at the Harvard Medical School. (7)

On the subject of Osler and age, Powell recalls, "The man Osler was never lost in the world-famous doctor. He was human. His staff all loved him. ...All joined in celebration of his [42nd] birthday, and though he was somewhat short of entering middle life, he quaintly said to me. 'Don't count the years. I'll get old fast enough.' "

Osler's textbook has been proclaimed a literary as well as a scientific masterpiece. Powell's role in this accomplishment has been acknowledged by Osler with but scant detail. For further elucidation we must turn to the account given by Powell shortly after the death of Osler:

"For months I spent every afternoon with Osler. In the morning to his studio, in the afternoon to his house, in the evening to his study. I ferreted out that puerperal fever was contagious, and as a result thousands of mothers have lived to bring their babies up. And he is such a boy among these many remembrances was a call, "The man Osler was never lost in the world-famous doctor. He was human." Osler's passion for things Oslerian, and the articles resulting therefrom, are familiar to regular readers of the Newsletter. Dr. Golden's passion for things Oslerian, and the articles resulting therefrom, are familiar to regular readers of the Newsletter. He is a member of the Library's Board of Curators, a past president of the American Osler Society, and co-author of the standard bibliography of Osler's writings. Somehow, he finds time to practice internal medicine on Long Island, and contribute to the professional literature — evidence of an energy and diversity of interests almost as prodigious as Osler's.
tuberculosis, meningitis, neuroses and other technical themes. When I arrived at 2 o’clock, the typewritten pages of Osler’s manuscript turned over to me for arrangement. Osler was modest. He embraced the mere boy by assertions that he really could not write a book. But seldom could I find more than a trifling inad- vertence due to a rapidity at times tu- multuous. When the first exchanges of that book that 1,097 pages appeared at the end of six months without neglect of any other duties, or of his supreme joy, the whole immediately took its place as the first in medicine.” (3)

Perhaps this is the account of a hero-wor- shipper of a modesty equal to that of his subject, but although it has the eloquent and persuasive ring of truth as evidenced by the Powell’s contribution was a significant one. It is logical to assume that the pen of Osler, it is logical to assume that in the United States and Canada, contributed articles to many magazines, and was the author of a number of books on religious, historical and educational themes. (3,4)

In 1902 Powell, on behalf of “an important magazine” with which he had an advisory relationship, wrote to Osler requesting his selection of the seven leading physicians of the United States for a proposed article. Lyman Powell, who was associated with the Lyman Powell, who was associated with the educational departments of the United States and Canada, contributed articles to many magazines, and was the author of a number of books on religious, historical and educational themes. (3,4)

The lives of these two men touched briefly but momentously in 1891, with a significant effect on the literary quality of Osler’s magnum opus, and leaving Powell profoundly impressed by the charismatic physician. Almost three decades later following Osler’s death, he wrote with great feeling and precision:

“Sir William Osler is gone. Scholar, teacher, ambassador of medicine, and gentleman, the entire field of medicine, diagnostician with such quick insight that often with one glance he recognized the all together in circumspect round his reception room before he had exchanged a word with them, friend with a genius to inspire and hold affec- tionate sides the ocean, man in whom greatness of mind and greatness of heart were so mingled that it was difficult to tell where one began and the other ended, he will one day be the sub- ject of a notable biography.” (3)

BIBLIOGRAPHY


A “GOLDEN” VOLUME OF “OSLERIAN VERSE”

A second volume in the series of Osler Library Studies in the History of Medicine has been published. This is Oslerian Verse, an anthology of poetry by and about Sir William Osler and his circle, selected and annotated by Dr. Richard Golden. Forty poems, some of them newly published, are gathered to- gether under nine topical rubrics, ranging from “Children” (where one can read Osler’s doggerel postcard to the young W.W. Francis) to “A Finality, that” (which includes a touching lyric on mortality by a young American physician). Included in the volume are a number of evocations of Osler by his second cousin Marion Osborne, a tribute by W.L. Mitchell, a Gilbertian patter-song by W.W. Francis, and my personal favourite, Thomas R. Boggs’ “When William Osler Makes his Rounds”:

Hastel Hastel ye clerks, make breakfast brief,
And follow close your lord and chief;
With paper blank and pen in fist,
Let not a single note be missed,
When William Osler, K.C.B., F.R.S., F.R.C.
Makes his rounds....

But there is more than balladry here. Dr. Golden has furnished each poem with a de- tailed commentary filled with his wonted eulogy and fine Oslerian sympathies. Errant autographs are identified, and a gallery of Osler and his circle, selected and annotated by Dr. Richard Golden’s concise and pertinent commen- tary will clarify and explain matters for us. We are grateful to Dr. Golden for having gathered this antique nogoosey, and for hav- ing preserved the unique perfume of each of its blooms.

In format, Oslerian Verse is uniform with the first volume in this series, Dr. E.H. Ben- ley’s Medical Luminaries. Copies may be ordered from the Library for $20, or $15 for Friends of the Osler Library (an order form is included in the newsletter which also includes two other publications: Bibliotheca Osleriana and The Osler Library). Canadian Friends should remit in Canadian currency (the price includes GST), and American Friends in U.S. dollars.

Faith Wallis
ADOPT-A-BOOK: AN UPDATE

The Osler Library's battered books continue to find generous patrons who are willing to "adopt" them for restoration. Since the inception of the "Adopt-a-Book" campaign (cf. newsletter issues for October 1991 and February 1992), seventeen volumes put up for adoption have been taken. Recently, Mme Edith Low-Beer, on behalf of the EJLB Foundation, took no less than five books under her wing, including Bulwer's Philosophy: or, the Deafe and Dumbe Man's Friend, Nathaniel Hodges' Loimologia: or, an Historical Account of the Plague in London in 1665, William Cowper's Anatomy of Humane Bodies, Daniel Le Clerc's Histoire de la médecine and an incunabulum, the Faciculus temporum. On behalf of Associated Medical Services of Toronto, its President, Dr. Donald Wilson, has underwritten the repair of two of the most unusual items on our list chosen by the Library, Roger's A Modern Sphinx (a biography of the enigmatic Dr. "James" Barry, a 19th century military surgeon who may well have been a woman), and the Mosaicall Philosophy of Robert Fludd, occult philosopher and ally of William Harvey. Thomas Bartholin's Anatomy is also on its way to rehabilitation, thanks to a gift from Mrs. Margaret Sifton of Town of Mount Royal, Quebec, and Dr. Lesley Gill has adopted John Floyer's Sibylline Oracles, chosen by the Library.

The response to the Adopt-a-Book program is a source of surprise, for the Library staff. Compared with acquiring new books, repairing old ones might seem at first sight to be uninteresting and lacking in appeal. But it is evident that the Library has friends and supporters who are imaginative and far-sighted as well as generous. Our sincere thanks goes out to them all for helping us to restore our finest treasures.

AN ITALIAN TWIN FOR OUR VIENNA DIOSCURIDES

In 1985, the Osler Library had the good fortune to be able to acquire, through a grant from the University's Director of Libraries, Dr. Hans Müllcr, a facsimile edition of one of the most important and beautiful medical manuscripts of the Middle Ages, the "Vienna Dioscurides". This is an illustrated herbal based on a famous encyclopaedia of medicinal plants by Pedanius Dioscurides, a Greek military physician who flourished in the middle of the first century A.D. The Vienna codex was made about A.D. 512 for a Byzantine princess named Anicia Julia, to thank her for endowing the construction of a parish church in the suburbs of Constantinople. Approximately one hundred years later, another illustrated manuscript of the same Dioscurides herbal was made in Italy, then under Byzantine rule. This second Dioscurides, now in the Biblioteca Nazionale in Naples, is evidently derived from the same model as Anicia Julia's book, but it varies from the Vienna codex in significant ways. For example, the manuscript's designer chose to present the plants in groups of two to four on the page, rather than devoting an entire page to a single specimen. The quality of the text is superior in the Naples copy, and the illustrations, though not as fine from an artistic point of view as those in the Vienna manuscript, are more lifelike.

Though historians know something about the history and extent of the ancient practice of medical-botanical illustration from references in classical works like Pliny's Natural History, very few examples of such books have survived. Among the rare witnesses of this tradition are the Vienna and Naples Dioscurides manuscripts. Hence it gives us special pleasure to announce that, thanks to funds made available through the Friends of the Osler Library, a facsimile of the Naples Dioscurides has been purchased as a companion for our Vienna volume. Published by Salerno Editrice in Rome, in collaboration with Akademische Druck of Graz, Austria, publishers of the Vienna Dioscurides, this facsimile reproduces the original manuscript in virtually every detail, even down to the irregular edges of the "parchment" pages. The acquisition of this facsimile will be of particular interest to art historians and students of ancient medicine, who will now be able to examine and compare at the Osler Library these two representatives of a rich, but vanished iconographic tradition.

MILESTONES

Hearty congratulations are due to Dr. Theodore Sourkes, a member of the Library's Board of Curators, who has recently been named to the Order of Canada in recognition for his important contributions to psychiatric pharmacology.

We are saddened to hear news of the death of Muriel Howard, widow of the late Dr. Palmer Howard of Iowa City, Iowa. The links between the Howard family and Osler go back to Osler's student days at McGill, when he fell under the sway of the then Dean, Robert Palmer Howard, one of the three dedicatees of Medicine. Over the years, Howards of every generation have been firm friends and supporters of the Library, and in the case of Dr. Palmer Howard, diligent researchers into things Oslerian as well. Our sympathies are extended to Palmer and Muriel Howard's children, Caroline Mast of Iowa City, and Dr. Campbell Howard of Kansas City.
The Library gratefully acknowledges the support it has received from Friends, both old and new, who have responded to the appeal for funds for the 1992-93 academic year. To date 266 Friends have given a total of approximately $15,037. A special donation of $5000 from MAP (McGill Advancement Program) is designated for various projects. Most of the contributions have come from Friends in Canada and the United States of America. However, very welcome contributions have also come from Australia, Brazil, Chile, Germany, Japan, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

The names of Friends whose contributions are recorded after January 31, 1993 will be listed in the June issue of the newsletter.

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