

# OSLER LIBRARY NEWSLETTER

MCGILL UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL, CANADA

No. 15 – FEBRUARY 1974

## THE OPEN ARMS



When Osler arrived in Oxford on 27 May 1905 he rented No. 7 Norham Gardens, complete with furniture, and set about finding a permanent home. The house he eventually chose was three houses further along the same road, No. 13 Norham Gardens, which soon acquired the name "The Open Arms" reflecting the well known hospitality of the Oslers. The situation was ideal for a medical man, being close to the social centre of the city and within ten minutes walk of the Science departments and wards of the Radcliffe Infirmary. The house had been designed by William Wilkinson, the architect who had been picked by St. John's College for the development of the Norham Estate, and had been built for Mr. Dallin, the Public Orator of the University. It was completed in 1870 and was one of the four houses that Wilkinson chose to illustrate the development of the area in his book on English Country Houses. Wilkinson's plate was subsequently reproduced as a typical example of English Victorian architecture by the great French architect Viollet-le-Duc in the second volume of his *Habitations Modernes*. The plans of the house and a picture of the outside, as it appeared when Osler bought it, were reproduced in a brief article in *Medical History*, 1973, 17: 217-222.

The house was too small for the amount of entertaining that Osler envisaged and he immediately set about its reconstruction. A new drawing room with bedroom above was added to the side, the dining room and the old drawing room were built out and a new terrace was created. Inside, the hall was enlarged by cutting off a part of the old drawing room (which was converted into the Library) and opening up the stairs. Three more bathrooms were created and equipped with the new-fangled imported porcelain tubs.

On Lady Osler's death the house was left to Christ Church, the college to which the Regius Professorship was traditionally attached. Christ Church, however, had little use for it and it was let out first as part of the Mathematical Institute and later as a hostel for women students before they were absorbed into the new College of St. Anne's. By 1950 the structure had begun to deteriorate and a tree could be seen growing out of the roof. Dr. A.H.T. Robb-Smith, the Nuffield Reader in Pathology at the Radcliffe Infirmary, and Professor A.D. Gardner, the Regius Professor, who continued to live in his old home on the outskirts of Oxford, were

Visitors to the Osler Library often express an interest in The Open Arms, the Oxford residence of Sir William and Lady Osler. Many of the enquiries relate to the present use of this home and the changes made since Lady Osler died in 1928. In view of this, the Editorial Committee asked the present Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford and occupant of The Open Arms, Sir Richard Doll, to write an account of the house for the *Newsletter*. Professor Doll kindly agreed and his contribution appears here.

disturbed at the lack of interest on the part of the College and persuaded Christ Church to give the house to the University. Part was divided off to make three flats for post-graduate students – with a preference for medical students from the USA and the Commonwealth – and the rest was modernized to make a suitable home for Sir George Pickering, who succeeded Professor Gardner in 1956. In 1969, on Sir George's retirement, further modifications were made and the house is now not only a privilege but a joy to live in. Sir William would not, I fear, recognise the interior of most of the rooms but he would feel at home in the hall, which is papered in the same style and has lost only its large oak fireplace and overmantel and some of the inevitable bookshelves, and also in the library which is hardly changed. He would miss the paintings of Linacre, Sydenham and Harvey which hung over the fireplace in the library and are now in the Osler Library at McGill University, but the triptych from Sir Henry Acland's library, from which they were copied, hangs in the next room looking down on Osler's drawing room carpet.

The part of the house which the Regius Professor now occupies consists of the entire ground floor apart from the old kitchen and scullery, and the back part of the first and second floors overlooking the garden and the Parks. Osler's consulting room has been turned into a dining room and his drawing room into a secretary's office, constituting what is probably the largest office for a single secretary in the whole University. The library makes an ideal study, while Osler's study – strategically situated on the first floor – has been turned into a bedroom. His simple triangular desk in the corner of the room remains, however, as it was and is still used as a desk. The number of bedrooms has been reduced from 17 to 6.

A plaque on the front of the house was donated by the Osler Club of London to commemorate Osler's residence. Inside

The decorated letter which appears on this page is reproduced from *The Life of St Thomas Bodley, the Honourable Founder of the Public Library in the University of Oxford*. Written by Himself. Oxford. 1647, *Bibl. Osl.* 7254.

## OUR LATEST EXHIBIT —

### THE HISTORY OF SMOKING

a few rather cumbersome pieces of his furniture remain in the office and the study, but the only important personal memento is an autopsy protocol written in his own hand at The Montreal General Hospital in 1882. There are also the remains of Lady Osler's coffee service, given by one of Sir William's personal assistants, Miss Mabel Fitzgerald, shortly before her 100th birthday, and a small collection of books by or about Osler, most of which have been donated to the house in the last few years by Canadian and American libraries.

It is, alas, no longer possible to invite all the North American doctors who visit Oxford to stay at The Open Arms. Not only are the numbers so much greater (which is good), but the amount of domestic assistance, reduced from 12 full-time to one half-time, is so much less. All, however, are welcome to call and to inspect the garden, the rooms, and a book of photographs of the rooms as they were.

Richard Doll,  
Regius Professor of Medicine,  
University of Oxford,  
13 Norham Gardens, Oxford.

### VISITORS

On November 27th, 1973 McGill University was visited by the Governor-General of Canada, His Excellency The Right Honourable Roland Michener, accompanied by Mrs. Michener. The Governor-General came in his official capacity as the University's Visitor acting on behalf of the Crown. Well in advance, Mr. and Mrs. Michener had specifically requested that the Osler Library be included in their itinerary. When they arrived in the Library, their keen interest immediately became obvious and they made the occasion a most enjoyable one for all who were involved.

During the same week the Osler Library received two other distinguished visitors, His Excellency Mr. Chang Wen-Chin, the Ambassador to Canada from the People's Republic of China, and Mrs. Chang. They were given a brief account of the history of the Osler Library and shown a number of our choicest memorabilia of Dr. Norman Bethune.

Mr. Karl Holeczek made a photographic record of both visits for the Library archives.

Prompted by a suggestion from one of our overseas correspondents, the Library staff organized an exhibit on the history of smoking. There was little problem in finding sufficient materials within the Library as Dr. Osler expressed great interest in the use of tobacco and selected 30 books for the Osleriana collection that dealt with this subject.

Our display, which was arranged chronologically to show the major developments in the history of smoking, began with the earliest use of the plant by Mayan and North American Indians and terminated with a somewhat dramatic illustration of the results of current tobacco habits. Although our purpose was not to preach the evils of smoking, it was necessary to restrain the staff member principally responsible for the exhibit as she is a reformed smoker and consequently obsessively seeks opportunities to convert habitual users. However, it is worth mentioning here that one of the distinguished members of the Department of the History of Medicine did indeed give up his pipe "forever" — of course, we do not claim that this was necessarily due to the effect of certain facts revealed in the exhibit!

In his search for gold in the New World, Columbus did not see the value of the "treasure" his sailors had discovered. Worth more than all the gold taken from America by Spanish conquistadors, tobacco was introduced to Europe in the early 1500's and quickly established itself both as a medicinal herb and as the means by which the novel pastime of smoking could be enjoyed.

A very interesting book appearing in the display is one which supplied Europeans with most of their early information about tobacco. Written by Nicolas Monardes in 1574 and titled 'Primera y segunda y tercera Partes de la Historia medicinal de las cosas...', it states that the tobacco plant would cure coughs, asthma, headache, cramp in the stomach, gout... and malignant tumours. Johann Neander's 'Tabacologia' (1626), another popular text which we exhibited, recommends tobacco as a remedy for almost all the ills which the flesh is heir to.

Of course the smoking craze had its opponents too. Pope Urban VIII found that both the laity and the clergy were chewing, smoking, and snuffing while in church. Not only were the sanctuaries filled with tobacco smoke but the tobacco-drinkers, as smokers were then called, were even spitting on the church floor. Papal edicts did nothing to stop the use of tobacco but eventually it was forbidden in church. One of the items exhibited is a book called 'A Counter-Blaste to Tobacco' issued by King James I of England. However his efforts to restrict smoking were also in vain. Many monarchs were as concerned as King James because smoking had drastically increased the hazards of fire and hundreds of European villages were being destroyed because of careless smokers.

## LORD TWEEDSMUIR, OSLER AND THE OSLER LIBRARY

Epidemics and wars greatly encouraged the spread of the smoking habit. Up to 1830, physicians prescribed smoking as a means of warding off infectious diseases. The young boys at Eton, for instance, were made to smoke every morning in order to disinfect themselves. And smoking naturally became a means also of deadening the fearful strains of war. General Pershing once cabled Washington during World War I, "Tobacco is as indispensable as the daily ration; we must have thousands of tons of it without delay."

Anti-smoking campaigns began in earnest during the mid 1800's and even Dr. Osler was known to speak out strongly against the immoderate use of tobacco. In *A Way of Life* he warned students against consorting "too much with the Lady Nicotine... A bitter enemy to the bright eye and the clear brain of the early morning is tobacco when smoked to excess..." However, Osler was not by any means an abolitionist where smoking was concerned. On the contrary, he once wrote "as a cigarette smoker of twenty-four years standing" . . . that smoking "a cigarette (a good one, of course! ) is to use tobacco in its *very best form*, and that in moderation it soothes physical irritability and corrects mental and moral strabismus" (*Montreal Medical Journal*, 1876, 24:879).

Smoking has now become deeply embedded in our cultural history. Remember "Call for Philip Morris" and "L.S./M.F.T.?" As more and more information is accumulated which points to the dangers of smoking, it becomes evident that even the most startling statistics do not prevent people from taking up the habit. Perhaps Oscar Wilde perceived the real attraction behind that cloud of tobacco smoke —

A cigarette is the perfect type of a perfect pleasure,  
It is exquisite and it leaves one unsatisfied. What more  
can one want?

Janis Shore,  
Cataloguer, Osler Library.

### Change of Address — Please Note

American readers still wishing to contribute to the Friends of the Osler Library should make their cheques payable to the Friends of McGill University Inc. and note that the address has changed to the following:

Friends of McGill University Inc.,  
Box 441,  
ELIZABETHTOWN, New York 12932, U.S.A.

The recent visit of the Governor-General to the Osler Library brings to mind an episode involving one of Mr. Michener's predecessors, Lord Tweedsmuir, better known in the world of letters as John Buchan. In a report to a meeting of the Board of Curators of the Osler Library held on May 17, 1937, Dr. W.W. Francis, the Osler Librarian, gave the following brief account of Tweedsmuir's visit to the Library.

Lord Tweedsmuir, the Governor-General, honoured the [Osler] Library with an unofficial visit on February 15th [1936]. A friend of Osler, and himself a collector (and descendant) of Sir Thos. Browne, his first enquiry was for the rare 1716 ed. of "Christian morals" [Bibl. Osl. 4513] which is dedicated to his ancestor, the "mad" Earl of Buchan, and which he had not seen before.

Dr. Francis' note is interesting but of much greater interest is the more detailed story which Dr. Francis recorded on page 11B of his "Showman's Patter. A Description of Books in the Osler Library." In reading this, it should be remembered that in 1935-36 the Osler Library was on the top floor of the Strathcona Medical Building, just two floors above the Assembly Hall mentioned in Dr. Francis' story.

When Tweedsmuir (John Buchan) as Governor-General paid his first official visit as Visitor to McGill [in November 1935] he was given a dinner in the Assembly Hall of the Medical Building. I suggested to the Dean that T. was the sort of man that would be interested [in the Osler Library] & that I should be on duty upstairs. The idea was pooh-poohed. The first thing T. asked was to be shown the Osler Library and they had to make excuses. Not long afterwards I heard from an ADC that the G.G. was to be in Montreal on 15 Feb., 1936, that 5:30 to 6 had been set aside for a private visit to the Osler Library, and that I was to tell no one. There was an unregal delay; he arrived after 6 and had only ten minutes. He was chiefly interested in the Brownes, which he collected himself, and asked to see the edition of a posthumous work which was dedicated to his ancestor, "the mad Earl of Buchan." The second book I got from the shelves was this one, the rare first edition of "Christian Morals," 1716, which he had never had a sight of before. He read through the dedication by Browne's daughter, Elizabeth Lyttelton, whom I think he also claimed as a forebear. He told me that one of the main reasons for his settling near Oxford in 1919 was to be near Osler whom he had once talked to and had always hoped to meet again, but never got another opportunity. Next day the Registrar, Dean & *al.* demanded why I had neglected to notify them, and it was with smug satisfaction that I answered, "Visitor's orders."

Unhappily Lord Tweedsmuir's hope that he would be near Osler and meet him again was unfulfilled. Osler died in December, 1919.

E.H. Bensley

Editorial Committee for the *Newsletter*: E.H. Bensley, Editor;  
Susan Biggs, Associate Editor; Karl Holeczek, Photography.

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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 1973-74 academic year.

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