

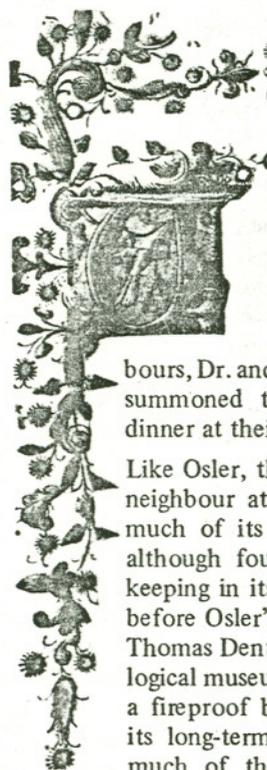
OSLER LIBRARY NEWSLETTER

McGILL UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL, CANADA

No. 20 – OCTOBER 1975

THE OSLERS AND THE COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS OF PHILADELPHIA:

Some Further Footnotes to a Twice-Told Tale



Upon his arrival in Philadelphia on the 11th of October, 1884, or shortly thereafter, to enter upon his duties as Clinical Professor of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, William Osler took up residence in two rooms in a lodging house at 131 S. 15th Street. Among his earliest visitors were two near neigh-

bours, Dr. and Mrs. Samuel W. Gross, who promptly summoned the 35-year-old bachelor to Sunday dinner at their big house down Walnut Street.

Like Osler, the College of Physicians, another near neighbour at 13th and Locust Streets, had spent much of its life in furnished lodgings. In fact, although founded in 1787, it had set up house-keeping in its own building only twenty-one years before Osler's arrival. The impetus had come from Thomas Dent Mütter's conditional gift of his pathological museum – conditional upon the erection of a fireproof building – and George Bacon Wood, its long-term President, had furnished or found much of the wherewithal. Very soon after the erection of the two-story building on Locust Street, Samuel Lewis, then the foremost American collector of rare and choice volumes in the history of medicine, had given 2,500 important works to the Library; other major gifts had begun to come in; and presently George Bacon Wood subscribed \$500 annually to provide for the regular attendance of a Librarian, at first one of the Fellows of the College.

In 1880, S. Weir Mitchell, gradually assuming Wood's late role of patriarch and benefactor, contributed \$1,000 to augment the journal fund; in 1882 a Nurses' Directory was begun, which survived for 50 years, and provided, all told, about \$100,000 to the support of the Library. The new building was already overcrowded with books, specimens and portraits, and a second building fund was commenced with Jacob Da Costa's gift of \$1,000 in March, 1883; construction of a third story was begun in May, 1885, and completed a year later. It must have been plain to the newly arrived Osler that the College was entering upon a period of vitality

The January 1974 issue of the *Transactions and Studies of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia* contained an article on the Historical Collections of the College Library. The author was Mrs. Lisabeth Holloway, Curator of the Historical Collections of the Library of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia. After reading this excellent article, the Editorial Committee of the *Osler Library Newsletter* invited Mrs. Holloway to write something for the *Newsletter* about Sir William and Lady Osler and the College Library. Mrs. Holloway kindly accepted this invitation and her contribution appears here.

and activity, stimulated by a group of congenial men – Mitchell, W.W. Keen, the younger Gross, Da Costa, James Tyson, and Horatio C. Wood, Jr. – who cultivated scholarship, hard work, good fellowship and enthusiasm, and whose writings still carry a most persuasive impression of zest and optimism.

This cheerful circle of kindred spirits absorbed Osler instantly. He was proposed for Fellowship on the 5th of November, less than a month after his arrival; the requisite second reading of the Proposition for Fellowship took place at the next stated meeting, December 3rd; at the third meeting, January 7th, he was elected and, though present, was not formally introduced to the other Fellows – very probably because he knew them informally already. At the next election of officers and committees, January 13, 1886, he was made a member of the Library Committee – this is said to be a record! – serving through 1888. He kept rather a low profile on the Committee, as it seems from its minutes, recorded correctly and colourlessly by the new Librarian, Charles Perry Fisher. E.B. Krumbhaar, himself only a toddler at this stage, had it from somebody, though he doesn't say whom, that Osler's service on the Committee was highly capable. He also says that Osler was often to be found browsing in the Library stacks, and that some of his "urgent appointments" were kept with authors dead for several centuries. During his stay in Philadelphia, the College celebrated its centenary at a great banquet, full of toasts and literary allusions, at which a number of distinguished foreigners were made "Honorary Associates"; it is generally thought that Palmer Howard's inclusion in this group came about through Osler's urging.

The decorated letter which appears on this page is reproduced from the illuminated copy of Celsus' *De medicina*, 1478 in the Library of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia. This copy of the *editio princeps* of Celsus is described in Mrs. Holloway's article.

Gross's father, the great Samuel D., who died May 6, 1884, had left his extensive library of surgery and medical history, numbering perhaps 4,000 volumes, to the Philadelphia Academy of Surgery, with the stipulation that they should be housed at the Library of the College. When Samuel W., who was the elder son, died on April 16, 1889, at the age of 52, his books, including his own notes on his father's lectures, were deposited with the collection at the request of his widow. Osler, stunned at the news of his friend's sudden illness, had hurried back from Montreal to join the unavailing councils round the bedside; according to Maude Seymour Abbott, the unsigned notice of Gross's death and the obituary a few weeks later in the *Medical News*, are both from Osler's pen. His own removal to Baltimore took place within three weeks; sometime within the next year, most likely, he sent a note to Fisher:

I shall be in Philadelphia tomorrow... Mrs. Gross asked me some time ago to let her know the next time I would be at the Library for an hour or so as she would like to see the Gross collection... I just send this so as to let you know in case you would like to have any tidying done in the room. From the way in which she spoke, I think she will look after the proper maintenance of the books.

From later correspondence, also to be found in the College Archives, it appears that Grace Revere Gross Osler continued Samuel W. Gross's share in the family's annual contribution to the Library in their father's memory, and kept it up until her death.

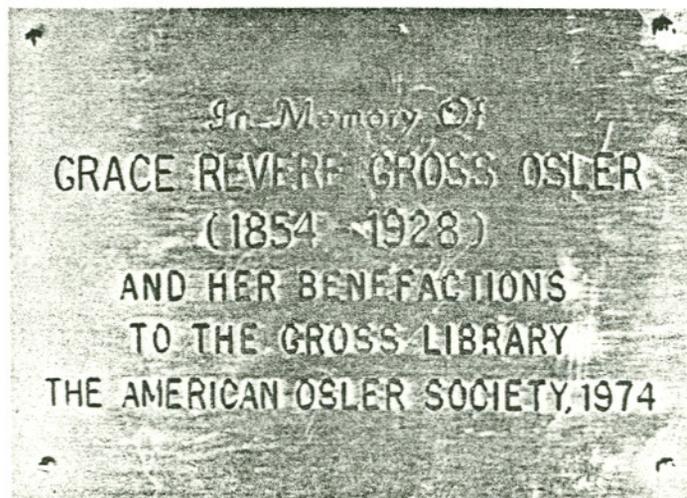
By the early 1900's, it was clear that the College would have to seek larger quarters once again, and a third building fund was begun. On March 9th, 1907, W.W. Keen sent Osler a set of plans of the prospective building, "especially for Mrs. Osler's information," and on the same day Keen wrote to A. Haller Gross, the second son and now head of the family, proposing for the Gross Collection "a prominent place in the bookstack," perhaps "set off by an iron grill" and marked by a brass plate. Haller Gross and his sister, Maria Rives Horwitz, "were pleased," as he wrote in October to William J. Taylor, secretary of the College's Building Committee,

with "all you are doing to carry out the provisions of the will of my Father. Mrs. Osler will carry out my brother's wishes."

However, Osler now seems to have intervened, according to Taylor, by suggesting to Keen that the Gross family might be prevailed upon to furnish a room to be called the "Samuel D. Gross Library," and to have urged the idea upon Haller Gross. After much letter writing among the principals (now including J. Ewing Mears, a former student of Samuel D.) who all seem to have been abroad in 1907 and 1908, just missing each other up and down the Continent, the details of location and furnishing were at last settled. Mears presented the bookcases and mantel; a portrait of Samuel D. was commissioned by Haller Gross and Mrs. Horwitz which now hangs over said mantel; and the chairs, table and rugs were ordered to the College's specifications and presented by Gross, Mrs. Horwitz, and Mrs. Osler.

Several of the numerous descendants of Samuel D. Gross have retained an interest in the Gross Room, as it is now known. Orville H. Bullitt, Mrs. Horwitz's grandson, who retains lively memories of the Oslers in Oxford, presented his great-grandfather's cane, which now also adorns the mantelpiece. Two other portraits hang in the room: Samuel W. Gross, as painted by F.Y. Heberton, and J. Ewing Mears, by the same artist. The endowment provided by bequests from the children of Samuel D. Gross is applied to the maintenance of the room, which continues in its original use, as the College's Council and committee room, and a favourite meeting-place for the Philadelphia Academy of Surgery. On the occasion of the meeting of the American Osler Society in April, 1974, by the generosity of Fred B. Rogers, a plaque was mounted, reading "In Memory of Grace Revere Gross Osler (1854-1928) and Her Benefactions to the Gross Library. The American Osler Society, 1974."

As Cushing notes, "Osler's interest in libraries was cumulative, and a contact once made was never lost." Both Francis R. Packard and E.B. Krumbhaar have reported in some detail on Osler's gifts to the Library. Krumbhaar found 54 such titles by searching the accession-books, and observes



Memorial plaque in the Gross Room of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia

that these do not include volumes or sets for which Osler was instrumental in launching subscriptions among the Fellows. The *Dictionary of National Biography* was secured by this means, Osler and Tyson, during Tyson's visit to Oxford in August, 1906, having started the subscription by pledging \$25 each. The most celebrated such subscription gift, Celsus' *De medicina*, 1478, in a beautifully illuminated copy bearing the signature of Giorgio Antonio Vespucci, uncle and tutor to Amerigo, was discovered by Osler in Quaritch's bookstore, and announced to Weir Mitchell in a note pencilled beneath the bookseller's description: "A superb copy. Why not bleed the Fellows of the College? I will go \$25. W.O." The note, with the list of subscribers, is pasted on the fly-leaf of the volume.

Of the other gifts, some are useful, everyday contemporary items, and some are exceedingly rare, such as *Der swangern Frau und hebammen Rosengarten* of Eucharius Röslein (Argentorati, Flach, 1513), for which Osler thoughtfully sent along the correspondence with the seller, whose Germanic English is enlivened by his substitution of the letter "J" for the pronoun "I". Much has been said elsewhere of several of these remarkable books; the sleeper in the list seems to be the *Phonographic Record of Clinical Teaching and Medical Science*, 1894-1911, a tiny little journal published in Pitman shorthand by the Society of Medical Phonographers, largely organized by Sir William Gowers, which held that a universal shorthand would save the busy medical student and practitioner much time. This odd little series contains several of Osler's articles, some translated and reprinted from other journals; according to Abbott, one, "The Diagnosis of Malignant Endocarditis," (v.1, pp. 107-109, 1894-95) seems not to have been published elsewhere. The College's run, volumes 1-14, in large part Osler's own set, is the longest run in the United States, and has attracted some attention lately. One wonders whether Osler himself ever tried to learn Pitman. He is quoted — in shorthand of course — "On the value of Shorthand to Medical Men" (v.12, no. 3, 1906).

Certainly the most warmly remembered of Osler's talents is his extraordinary gift for friendship. In the Philadelphia circle he met others nearly his match. W.W. Keen, in his "Tribute" in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 1920, says, "He was a fount of inspiration. His personal influence extended more widely and to better purpose than that of almost anyone I have ever known. Weir Mitchell and William Pepper were of the same type and when this powerful triumvirate were gathered in Philadelphia, they had no rival the country or possibly the world over."

More like a trio of confidence men, one is tempted to say — philanthropic, bibliophilic con men of enormous charm, who could, and did, bluff each other out of their opinions, their pocket-change, or their latest acquisition — luckily all for the benefit of the institutions of Philadelphia. Osler lost his first copy of George Bacon Wood's suppressed doggerel epic, *First and Last* (see *Bibl. Osl.* 5596n) to Weir Mitchell

for the College Library in this fashion; and Mitchell in turn was relentlessly "bled" (notwithstanding his own gifts of many hundreds of volumes to the College Library) by Osler's subscriptions among the Fellows.

Keen relates how, after he had got in ahead of Osler among the Italian bookshops in 1907-08, picking up for the College some 25 incunabula and other rariora, Osler, finding himself anticipated, retaliated with a postcard largely and legibly bearing the words "YOU PIG". And Charles Walts Burr, Osler's student at the University, who, like Krumbhaar and Packard, recorded his admiration for Osler as a man of letters, presented the whopping total of 19,000 volumes to the University Library, and many rarities to the College. Pepper, as founder of the Free Library of Philadelphia, now by far the largest library in the city, is credited by Osler with taking his uncle — Pepper's own uncle, of course — for a quarter of a million dollars for that institution, to say nothing of raising a cool million not long before his death, to establish a public art museum.

Most important to the College of Physicians and its Library, of course, to return from this tempting bypath, were the traditions of scholarship and the sense of history which Osler, Mitchell and Pepper left behind them, and which continued vigorous among succeeding generations of Fellows, such as Burr, A.P.C. Ashhurst, Packard, and Krumbhaar, whose names appear as members of the Library Committee for several decades. Long lists of important gifts from many donors are recorded through the twenties and even into the thirties, while at the same time almost 1,400 rare books, including 200 incunabula, were bought out of the Library's regularly budgeted Fund for Rare Books. In the 1950's, the libraries of Packard and Krumbhaar came in, as perhaps the last of the immediate effects of the wide ranging influence of Keen's "triumvirate."

One day in the spring of 1921, Charles Perry Fisher had a letter in a familiar bold hand:

13 Norham Gardens, Oxford
March 7

Dear Mr. Fisher:

By his will Sir William Osler left to McGill University, Montreal, his most important medical & scientific books. In a memorandum written during his illness, he expressed the wish that certain specified books should be given to other libraries and that these books should be entered in the catalogue of his library which is being prepared for McGill University, with a statement added showing where they are deposited. The following are the instructions contained in the memorandum as far as it refers to the College of Physicians of Philadelphia:

"To the College of Physicians of Philadelphia — the Mon[t]pellier Ms — Text Book 1373." [* See Francis's letter following; the date should be 1348.]

I regret it will not be possible to forward this MS to you until the catalogue has been finished and certain legal requirements have been carried out.

Very sincerely,
Grace Revere Osler.

The volume itself did not arrive until December of 1928, accompanied by another letter, more informative.

13, Norham Gardens, Oxford
10th December 1928

Dear Mr. Fisher,

The Osler Library has now been sent to McGill, and it is high time you received the manuscript which Sir William Osler directed should be sent to the College. The memorandum in which he makes this special gift is printed in Dr. Cushing's 'Life of Sir William Osler', vol. ii, p. 683. The MS. is the 'Lilium Medicinæ' of Bernardus de Gordonio, and was written in 1348, not 1373 (as Osler put down in his memorandum from memory).

I have inserted an extract from a proof copy of our catalogue entry, no. 7523. . . .

I am sending the book by registered mail, insured for £50/-/. This is only my rough guess at the value, which is, of course, enhanced by the interesting binding, Oxford work of the fifteenth century....

Yours sincerely,
W.W. Francis.

These letters were filed with the manuscript by the late W.B. McDaniel, 2d, Fisher's successor as Librarian of the College. When the present writer first saw the volume, in 1964, some hasty believer in Progress — not McDaniel — had sprayed the binding with a plastic coating. Upon consultation with Ellen Shaffer, then Librarian of the Rare Book Department of William Pepper's selfsame Free Library of Philadelphia, the volume was sent for examination to the eminent restorer, Harold Tribolet of Chicago, who reported that the plastic would in time destroy the original leather and recommended that the backstrip, already itself a replacement, be replaced again. This he did, beautifully matching the 15th-century leather fragments and melding them again to the front and back covers, mending the parchment pages where necessary, and adding almost invisible guardsheets to correct the badly pinched spine. We put the insurance valuation, I may say, considerably higher than did W.W. Francis. We hope that the volume may now survive its next six hundred years in somewhat better physical condition than it did its first.

Ever since its arrival, the 'Lilium Medicinæ' has been a favourite exhibition-piece. Dr. McDaniel noted, on one such occasion:

Of the library's eight [the count now is higher] medieval manuscripts, this is one of three written in the 14th century and the most extensive of the eight. The only recorded manuscript of the work in the United

States and Canada,* it was bequeathed by Sir William Osler to this library and thus closed the record of his many donations in a magnificent fashion.

Bernard's "Lily of Medicine" is described by Castiglioni (Krumbhaar, transl.) as typically dogmatic and scholastic in form, but notable for its early description of a truss for inguinal hernia and for possibly the earliest reference to spectacles (oculus berellinus).

Of all the many and varied remembrances of Sir William which the College continues to cherish, this last loving gift is the most poignant, bearing in its own right six centuries of human experience, and charged with the parting assurance of affection of our best beloved friend.

Lisabeth M. Holloway

*This comfortable conviction was shared by several other libraries, each of which held that its own 'Lilium' was the only manuscript of that title in America, until Thomas Herndon gently disabused them all (*Bull. Hist. Med.* 34:80-81, 1960).

FRIENDS OF THE OSLER LIBRARY

For 1975-1976, the *Bibliotheca Osleriana* is being made available to our Friends at the reduced price of \$40 (instead of the regular \$65). Most of the copies of this 1969 reprint have been sold but a few remain. The Osler Library would like to make these more accessible to the Friends in appreciation for their support. A yellow order form has been inserted. Please note that, in order to take advantage of this reduction, it is necessary to submit your order to the Friends of the Osler Library at the Montreal address.

With this issue of the *Newsletter*, an appeal for funds for the 1975-76 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 grey 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 repair and restore two of the most important works in its collections, William Harvey's *De motu cordis* (*Bibl. Osl.* 692) and Osler's three-volume "Post-mortem book of the Montreal General Hospital".

Though the *De motu cordis* is one of the intellectual landmarks of the seventeenth century, it was printed on paper far inferior to the best that century's papermakers could produce. After nearly 350 years of ageing, the paper in the Library's copy had deteriorated enough to preclude extended use of the book. To halt deterioration and to strengthen its leaves, the book was deacidified and then resized. In addition, worn edges on several pages were repaired.

The repair and restoration of Osler's "Post-mortem book of the Montreal General Hospital" was a larger project. Each of the three volumes was deacidified. Then the post-mortems in volume three, which Osler had scribbled on odds and ends of paper and pasted into an accounting book, were unfolded, dismounted, repaired or laminated, and then remounted. Finally, each of the three volumes was rebound in leather and buckram.

Editorial Committee for the *Newsletter*: E.H. Bensley, Editor; Ronda Wohl, Associate Editor; Philip Teigen, Librarian; Penelope Slepokura, Editorial Assistant; Karl Holeczek, Photography.

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