

OSLER LIBRARY NEWSLETTER

McGill University, Montreal, Canada

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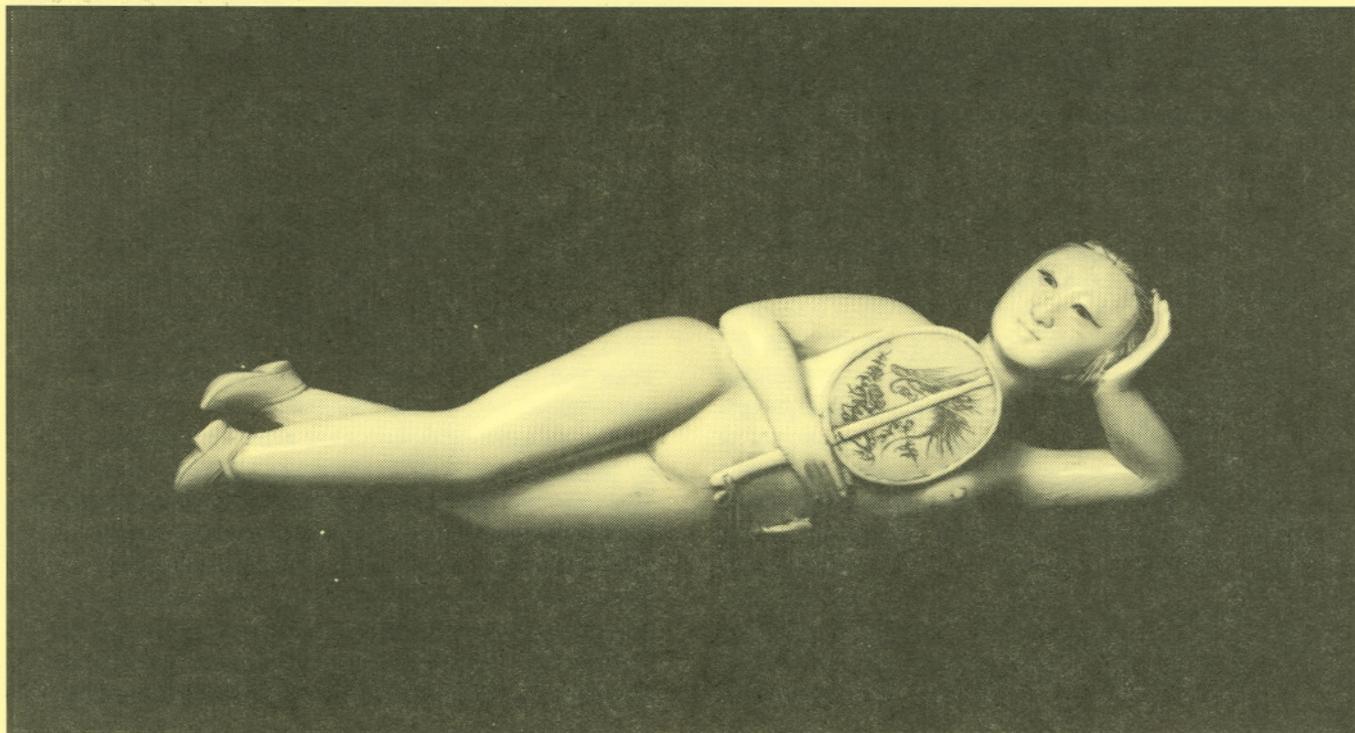
THE CLASS OF MEDICINE 1936 PRESENTS ITS ANNIVERSARY GIFT TO THE OSLER LIBRARY



THE OSLER LIBRARY, like most libraries, is usually a quiet place where students can drink in the printed word undisturbed by anything more obtrusive than a rustling page or a discreet cough. But on the afternoon of Friday, September 19, the Wellcome Camera resounded with popping champagne corks, clinking glasses, and the greetings and laughter of Reunion Weekend. The participants in this unusual scene were members of the class which graduated from McGill's Faculty of Medicine in 1936, and they celebrated their fiftieth anniversary as physicians by a deed of extraordinary generosity. A class gift of a capital fund of approximately \$145,000, built up over some years under the guidance of Class President Dr. H. Locke Robertson, was presented to the Osler Library by Dr. J.F. Meakins, Registrar-in-Chief of the Royal Victoria Hospital. After the presentation and acceptance of the four-foot-long ceremonial "cheque", some of the plans for this new fund were outlined. Purchasing medical works on the rare books market will be a first priority. Over the past decade, it has become increasingly difficult for the Library to buy rare books other than in certain carefully restricted fields for which we have obtained special government or university funding; this situation is due not only to the rising prices of old medical books, but to the rapid growth of current publishing in the history of medicine which the Osler Library is obliged to collect. However, with this new fund, the Library will once again be able to acquire desirable volumes to complement its present historical materials. Thus, the Class of '36 have become "second founders" of the Osler Library. Their gift will make possible for the 21st century what Sir William Osler's bequest made possible in the 20th. Moreover, the Class of Medicine 1936 Fund will also be used to endow the Osler Library Fellowships on a permanent basis, and Dr. Richard Cruess, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, announced to the Class that the portion of the fund income used for Fellowships would be matched by moneys from the Faculty. Principal David Johnston added his own words of congratulations and thanks to the Class for their splendid gift, one which supports not only the Osler Library's role as "the soul of the Medical Faculty", but the University's mission to be "the soul of society".

The pride and pleasure that pervaded the formal presentation and speeches overflowed into an uninhibitedly mirthful party afterwards. As champagne glasses were filled and refilled, members of the Class of Medicine 1936 exchanged news and stories, and paused to admire a display in the Osler Room of Chinese "doctor's ladies" of carved ivory, jade, bone and amber, collected and donated to the Library by none other than their classmate, Dr. J.F. Meakins. Dr. Meakins' first "doctor's lady" came to him from his father, Dr. J.C. Meakins, the first Director of the University Clinic in the Royal Victoria Hospital, and Dean of McGill's Faculty of Medicine from 1941 to 1943 and 1944 to 1947. By combing through curio shops on his own world travels, Dr. J.F. Meakins has added eighteen lovely figurines to the original bequest from his father. In traditional Chinese society, and particularly among the upper classes, the separation of the sexes was very strictly enforced. These prohibitions applied even to medical doctors. Although he might be granted permission to enter the women's quarters, the physician did not ordinarily see the ailing lady. At most, she might extend her hand from behind the bed-curtains so that he might take her pulse. Even when doctor and patient conferred face to face, it was unthinkable that the woman would expose any part of her body below her collar, or above her wrists and ankles. Diagnosis under these conditions was somewhat difficult, but during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), an ingenious expedient was devised: the diagnostic figurine or "doctor's lady". Ordinarily depicted as completely naked except for her shoes, the ivory, jade, bone or amber "lady" reclines on her side or back, her upper leg crossed over her lower one, one arm supporting her head and the other normally draped across her bosom. Genuine diagnostic dolls conform to traditional Chinese notions of female beauty: short legs, small breasts, a pleasantly rounded belly, and of course, tiny bound feet. The physician would carry such a doll with him on his visits, and pass it through the curtains to the patient, who would mark the afflicted part with charcoal or India ink. A wealthy lady might have her own figurine, which she would send to the doctor, and thereby completely avoid the embarrassment of a house-call. Diagnostic figurines are now much prized in the West, though the tourist industry has contrived to debase and denature the doctor's lady into a suggestive and rather occidentalized odalisque. Nonetheless, patient and knowledgeable collectors such as Dr. Meakins can still find miniature masterpieces of carving, beautiful in themselves and fascinating as relics of a vanished

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An ivory Chinese diagnostic figurine, from the collection donated to the Osler Library by Dr. J.F. Meakins.

society. Among the surprises in Dr. Meakins' collection are four "ladies" whose feet or top-knots can be pulled out to reveal a narrow, shallow spoon, possibly for the administration of medicine. Some "ladies" hold flowers or fans, and each has an individualized coiffure and facial expression — languid, alert, coy or abstracted by turns. Reclining on their mahogany couches against the red velvet lining of the display case, they make a striking and even whimsical scene, particularly when set against the sober Edwardian profile that looks out from the Vernon plaque. Their presence added an extra note of beauty and charm to the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the Class of 1936 in the Osler Library. In many ways, this Class has proved itself a special benefactor, and the Library is happy to acknowledge its sincere gratitude.

Faith Wallis

OSLER REVISITED

As announced in the February 1984 issue of the *Osler Library Newsletter*, Dr. Nicholas Dewey was organizing a medico-historical conference entitled "Osler Revisited" to be held in the autumn of 1984. The conference was a success and Dr. Dewey has received requests for a repeat performance from those who could not attend in 1984. This he plans to arrange for the week April 5th through the 12th, 1987, again at Merton College, Oxford with again a post-conference tour of "Osler's Norfolk". Readers who wish detailed information should communicate directly with Dr. Nicholas

Dewey, Medical History Conferences, BCM. BOX. DEWEY, London, WC1N 3XX, England.

OSLER SOCIETY OF MCGILL UNIVERSITY REPORT FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 1985-86

The sixty-fourth year of the Osler Society was made an interesting one by the variety of invited guest speakers.

The year began appropriately with a biography of Sir William Osler given by long-term friend and much appreciated supporter of the Society, Dr. Edward Bensley. Afterwards, we had Dr. Faith Wallis, then the Assistant History of Medicine Librarian of the Osler Library, who enthusiastically revealed some of Osler's treasured volumes.

In October we had Dr. Donald Bates, who being associated with Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, gave an up-to-date presentation of the involvement of physicians in the global arms race issue. The discussion grappled with such questions as whether arms expenditure and not nuclear war should be the primary issue addressed.

In January a most stimulating evening was spent with Dr. Balfour Mount, Director of the Palliative Care Unit of the Royal Victoria Hospital. The film "The Wall" by Pink Floyd was viewed and the ensuing discussion centered on the contemporary issue of alienation in our society.

In April the Osler Society was guided through the history of the medical profession's change of outer garment. Dr. Bernard Brais, past president of the Society, presented his original research from the archives of The Johns Hopkins Hospital. Dr. Brais offered his hypothesis that the white

coat was adopted as the medical profession began to employ the laboratory for investigation of patients and research.

The Annual Osler Lecture was held in May with the guest speaker being Mr. James P. Grant, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Mr. Grant entitled his lecture "The Child Survival Revolution: Bringing the power of health to people". He emphasized the value of communication through radio and television networks that now can reach the great majority of the world's population, thus enabling dissemination of such programs as vaccination and oral rehydration for diarrhoea.

The Osler Banquet which followed was held in the pleasant surroundings of the McGill Faculty Club dining room. As a toast to Osler the ceremonial loving cup made its way around the room to the merriment of all. The evening was concluded by remarks by Mr. Grant who left us with a degree of optimism for the future of health care in the developing world.

Anthony Garami, M.D., C.M.
President, Osler Society 1985-86

OSLER LIBRARY FELLOWSHIPS FOR 1987

As announced in the lead article of this *Newsletter*, the funding of the Osler Library Fellowship is now on a secure and permanent footing, thanks to the new Class of Medicine 1936 Endowment. However, the Library will not receive any interest income from this fund until the next fiscal year, and therefore the Fellowships for 1987, like those of the previous two years, will be financed by the Friends of the Osler Library and by a private donor. The donor in question is the newest member of the Library's Board of Curators, Dr. Joseph Nathanson (M.D., C.M., McGill, 1919), gynaecologist, educator and medical historian.

During its meeting last spring to choose the recipients of the 1986 Fellowships, the Selection Committee had a very stimulating discussion about the nature and future of the Fellowship programme, sparked by an enthusiastic research proposal from a medical undergraduate. We realized that, while our advertisement welcomed application from students, our procedures and criteria were entirely directed towards established medical historians. The Committee agreed that some better provision ought to be made for a medical student fellowship, especially in view of Sir William Osler's intention that his Library be primarily for the use of medical students. At its May meeting, the Board of Curators approved a plan whereby the Library might offer two fellowships each year, one to a scholar, the other to a medical student. Each fellowship will have a different purpose and a different application process.

The 1987 Fellowships will be offered according to this new scheme. Both fellowships are designed to permit researchers from outside Montreal to travel here and establish temporary residence while conducting their investigations. However, the scholar's fellowship will follow the lines laid

down in 1985 and 1986 in requiring a cogent and original research proposal demonstrably relevant to the collections of the Osler Library. Application for the medical student's fellowship, on the other hand, should be accompanied by an outline of a reading programme in some aspect of history of medicine suitable to the Library's resources. Students are also asked to provide two letters of reference from instructors at their medical school. Academic advice will be available to student fellows from the Department of Humanities and Social Studies in Medicine of McGill's Faculty of Medicine. Both types of application should be accompanied by a *curriculum vitae*. The deadline for application is January 31, 1987, and enquiries should be addressed to Dr. Faith Wallis, History of Medicine Librarian, Osler Library, 3655 Drummond St., Montreal, Quebec, Canada H3G 1Y6.

OSLER AND THE EDITOR OF *LIFE* MAGAZINE

Dr. Earl F. Nation has informed the Osler Library of the existence of an Oslerian item concerning antivivisection in an 1895 issue of the magazine *Life*. He had been unable to locate it and asked for help. A search revealed that it appeared in *Life*, November 14, 1895 as a reprint of the following letter originally published in *The Medical News: A Weekly Journal of Medical Science*, October 26, 1895.

To the Editor of *The Medical News*, Sir: I write to thank you for the sensible and outspoken letter to *Life*, which is reprinted in the *News* of last week. Since the appearance, some months ago, of a venomous and malicious antivivisection-cartoon, I have neither bought nor looked at *Life*. For years I had enjoyed its pages, but a journal that insults my best friends insults me, and I shun it as I would a blackguard of the slums. Yours, William Osler, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, October 21st.

The Editor of *Life* added the following comment.

Of course we are sorry to lose Mr. William Osler as a subscriber, but we are constrained to admit that he does a wise thing in not reading *Life*. It would only irritate him. He will find a more congenial and soothing occupation in mutilating his four-footed friends — if that happens to be his trade.

Those who wish to know the details of the immediate background to this heated exchange should consult *The Medical News: A Weekly Journal of Medical Science*, October 19, 1895. This contains the lengthy letter to *Life* which Osler praised in his letter of October 21.

Cushing, in *The Life of William Osler*, refers briefly in a footnote (vol. 1, pp. 449-450) to the controversy with the Editor of *Life*. He mentions Osler's letter of October 21, 1895 and the "venomous and malicious" *Life* cartoon which Osler regarded as an insult to his friends. Cushing suggests that a curtain be drawn over the Editor's reply to Osler. Perhaps I should apologize for removing the curtain but surely at this late date it can do no harm. In any event, Cushing points out that in subsequent years *Life* "atoned" for its past attitude.

E.H.B.

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

Since last October, individuals and institutions from all over the world have contributed more than \$12,500 to the Friends of the Osler Library Fund. This money has been put to a very wide variety of uses. By far the largest percentage — almost \$8,000 — went towards the purchase of books in three categories: general rare books, rare books in the area of the social impact of medicine in 18th and 19th century Europe, and current secondary literature.

The outstanding acquisition in the first category was undoubtedly Deschambre's *Dictionnaire encyclopédique des sciences médicales* (Paris: Asselin & Masson, 1864-1889). This 100-volume encyclopedia "includes a great number of articles written by the best known medical men of the period" (Garrison and Morton, *A Medical Bibliography*, no.6801). The Medical Library at McGill University possessed only one volume of the set, and into this Dr. W.W. Francis pencilled a note expressing his disappointment at finding but a *membrum disiectum* of the famous compendium. The Friends may take a certain pride in having gratified, though at a remove of many years, the wish of so knowledgeable a medical bookman as Dr. Francis!

The second category of book purchases helped to extend an innovative collections programme in primary materials reflecting the social impact of medicine in 18th and 19th century Europe inaugurated in 1981 with funds from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (see *Osler Library Newsletter*, no. 37). This grant expired in 1984, but in the spring of 1985 the Director of the McGill University Libraries provided bridging funds to sustain the programme until we could apply for a renewal of the grant in 1986. The response from rare books dealers in Europe and America was exceptionally good, and the Director's funds were spent by December 1985. Many treasures might have slipped through our fingers had not the gifts of the Friends of the Osler Library been available to cover purchases in this field until the renewal of our government grant in June 1986.

Less obviously glamorous, but no less essential, were the purchases of current work in the history of medicine. The quantity and quality of publication in this field are rising dramatically, but the fluctuating value of the Canadian dollar would make it impossible for us to fulfill our goal of comprehensive collecting were it not for the Friends.

This year, the Friends of the Osler Library also provided the stipends for our two Osler Library Fellows, Dr. William Stoneman of Victoria College, University of Toronto, and Professor Roger Buckley of the University of Connecticut (see *Osler Library Newsletter*, no.52). The presence of these gentlemen in the Library this summer was a very enjoyable and stimulating experience for us all. Both confessed to finding a far greater quantity of material in the Osler Library than they had anticipated, and return visits are being planned for the Christmas break. Thus, in making the Fellowship

programme for 1986 possible, the Friends have initiated research which will extend far beyond the four weeks of the Fellowship period.

One very valuable feature of the Friends' support is that it permits us to hire specialists on a project basis to catalogue or inventory unusual categories of materials. For a number of years now, the Friends have contributed to the fees of our rare books cataloguing consultant, Mrs. Tamara Seni. This summer, their donation, in conjunction with other Library funds and a federal government "Challenge" grant, paid an Honours student in History, Blake Gopnik, to survey the correspondence to and from Sir William Osler in the Osler Library; this is a very important project on which we hope to report at greater length in the future, and which will eventually result in a printed inventory and index. In brief, the Friends of the Osler Library are involved not only in the growth of our collections, but in the preparation and dissemination of information which will permit their fullest scholarly use.

Finally, the Friends of the Osler Library provide the funds for the publication of the *Osler Library Newsletter* and for other occasional publications of the Library, for example, the brochure *McGill Medical Milestones* by the Honorary Osler Librarian Dr. E.H. Bensley, a copy of which is being mailed out with this issue of the *Newsletter*. This year, their gifts will make possible a major money-saving innovation in the production of the *Newsletter* through the purchase of the *WordPerfect* software programme for our IBM word processor. This programme is used by the computer-driven typesetting equipment available at McGill University's Instructional Communications Centre; by sending the typesetters a fully proofread text on diskette, we will eliminate the expense of re-entering the *Newsletter* text, and will dispense with the necessity of reading proofs for typographical errors. The saving of time and money will repay the Friends' investment in a year of two. Moreover, *WordPerfect* opens the doors to further publishing ventures on the part of the Osler Library, in which its Friends will play a vital role.

With this issue of the *Osler Library Newsletter*, we launch our appeal for funds for the 1986-1987 academic year. The projects supported by the Friends last year were highly innovative, and the possibilities for the future are equally exciting; our many good Friends, old and new, are warmly invited to share in these ventures and adventures.

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Faith Wallis, History of Medicine Librarian and Associate
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