

OSLER LIBRARY NEWSLETTER

McGill University, Montreal, Canada

No. 70 - June 1992

TROTULA, OSLER AND FRANCIS



Osler's propensity for using nick-names, or trick-names, as terms of endearment is common knowledge. These begin with "The Widow Gross", for his wife and "Isaac" (and others) for his son,

Revere. He used many for children of friends and relatives, and, of course, E.Y.D., the pseudonym behind which he hid his alter ego. Colleagues were less often so addressed. Students were frequently victimized.

Cosmo Gordon and Geoffrey Keynes, two Cambridge graduates who were working on a bibliography of Sir Thomas Browne when they first visited Osler in this connection were dubbed by Osler, "Cosmas and Damian". Gordon, who went on to become a distinguished librarian, did not continue to use his nickname, while Keynes often signed himself "Damian".

Gordon and Keynes, like others, may not have been aware of the significance of the names at the beginning and were doubtless kept in the dark by the Professor. Osler, naturally, was quite familiar with the history of these fourth century twin brothers who are the traditional patron saints of medicine, after St. Luke. They had been known as the "Moneyless Ones" because they refused compensation for their practice of medicine. They earned their sainthood by being beheaded, along with three brothers, for their Christian beliefs. Osler obviously had not chosen these names at random.

The best known of his nick-names, outside of E.Y.D. and those for his son, Revere, is probably "Trotula" Cushing gave full play to this in the Life. The lady so christened shortly after her arrival at Oxford was Miss Gertrude Flumerfelt, of Vancouver, British Columbia. She later wrote of this as follows:

'He gave me the name "Trotula" at my first meeting and never called me anything else. His delight was great at the general mystification of all of my friends, including my medical friends, as to who or what Trotula was, and it was months before a friend managed to unearth her history for me.'

Of course, what she found out was that Trotula was reputed to have been an eleventh century female physician of Salerno. The original Trotula's professional fortunes had gone up and down but her funeral cortege was alleged to have been two miles long, so that her terminal popularity must have been considerable. The surviving written work attributed to Trotula is *De Passio-*

nibus Mulierum Curandorum. This title was freely translated by Elizabeth Mason-Hohl, of Los Angeles, as *The Disease of Women by Trotula of Salerno*. Her book with this title, published in 1940, was the first "true" English translation from the Latin edition of 1547, printed by the Aldine Press of Venice. Dr. W.W. Francis, Osler's "nephew", and Librarian of the Osler Library in Montreal, was later responsible, through Dr. Myron Prinzmetal, the Los Angeles cardiologist, for seeing that Trotula's namesake received a copy of Dr. Mason-Hohl's translation.

When Osler's Trotula was going up for her physiology examination Osler prepared for her a fictitious test in physiology. He designated it for "The Hilary Term, 1660". He signed the examination "Thomas Willis ex Aede Christi". Most Oslerians have seen this reproduced in *Cushing's Life*, volume 2,

that exam? Silly thing! Chuck your head - you will never need it again".

A short time later he wrote, "When are you to be married? Do not wait too long - please. No man is worth waiting for more than six months".

She soon married Geoffrey Jefferson, who became a noted neurosurgeon of Manchester, and was later knighted.

A warm correspondence continued. Osler sent her a carbon copy of his famous letter to Dr. Remsen, President of Johns Hopkins, concerning full-time professors.

Meantime, Dr. W.W. Francis and the Jeffersons had become well acquainted and this relationship had some amusing twists after Francis returned to Montreal with the library. His sense of humor was different but just as acute as his forebear's. An exchange that took place at the time of Osler's centen-



Andrew Keogh, Yale Librarian, Lady Jefferson (Trotula), and Harvey Cushing in the garden at Yale.

opposite page 203. She later wrote of it, "It was to discourage me in my hopes of being able to pass". Osler's response to her by letter, after the examination, was, "I am glad to hear - though not surprised - that the examiners were deceived. Considering how little you know of the higher physiology, as illustrated by my paper, you must have had shocking duffers as examiners on that subject".

Three years later, when Trotula was about to go up for her final examinations, in 1912, Osler learned of her engagement. He wrote: "Twas as I thought and knew! Hearty congratulations - only having known me, to decide on a Surgeon is a bit hard". After inviting them to be married at 13 Norham Gardens, he went on: "Why bother about

ary is an example. It originated with Trotula.

It began with a letter signed, "Marlene Yorrick Davis", from "The Guildhall, Caughnawaga, Quebec, Canada, 24th May, 1949".

My Dear Sir,

I am writing this in the Guildhall in the peace that comes over me when I am in the company of my grandfather's mind, if not of his body - surrounded by the famous Egerton Yorrick Davis collection. As I look at some of its treasures, the skull of Plato

The lead article in this issue of the Newsletter comes from the prolific pen of that many-sided Oslerian, Dr. Earl Nation. It was originally presented as a paper before the American Osler Society at its spring meeting in San Diego.

**FROM ONE HISTORIAN
TO ANOTHER:
GEORGE MACKINNON WRONG
WRITES TO HARVEY CUSHING**

Some months ago, the Osler Library received a visit from Dr. G. Hammond of the Cadham Provincial Laboratory in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Dr. Hammond's immediate purpose was to pursue his research on the historical bibliography of infectious disease, but in the course of our conversation, he revealed that he had recently purchased a second-hand copy of Cushing's *Life of Sir William Osler*, in which he had discovered a letter from Cushing himself. The letter was addressed to George Mackinnon Wrong (1860-1948), then professor of history at the University of Toronto, who evidently had written to Cushing to express his admiration for the biography. In his reply, Cushing spoke as one historian to another, and revealed a rather surprising difficulty he had encountered in preparing the *Life*.

Dear Mr. Wrong,

Nothing could have pleased me more than your note - the more so in coming from a Professor of History for I assume you bear the well known name of George Mackinnon.

It is good of you to have spoken so highly of the 'Osler' and I am glad you did not find it too long - as many of the English reviewers have done.

I wish that I had known of your friendship with Osler for I would have written you in the hope of getting letters I might use.

As a matter of fact I had very poor picking -- far less good than the final story would seem to show. A biographer I found has to extract letters by force. But then I found out many other things during the course of my four years job. It gave me a far better education than four years as an undergraduate at Yale. Could they have as good a subject I would recommend the process to anyone in search of an education.

It was most kind of you to have written me such an encouraging letter about the book.

Very sincerely yours

Harvey Cushing

Sept. 24, 1925

That Cushing had difficulty in finding primary materials for his encyclopaedic biography is, as he himself points out, certainly not obvious to the reader. And Cushing's art, which fleshed out the meagre "pickings" into an ample and richly textured story, was definitely one which Wrong himself appreciated and practiced as a historian. Wrong can justly be called Canada's first professional academic historian. Born in Elgin County, Canada West and educated at Wycliffe and University Colleges in the University of Toronto, he taught history at that University from 1892 to 1927. Wrong was one of the founders of the Champlain Society, and in 1897 launched the *Review of Historical Publications Relating to Canada*, afterwards renamed *Canadian Historical Re-*

view. Of his numerous Publications, probably the most significant were his *Rise and Fall of New France* and *A Canadian Manor and its Seigneurs*. Interestingly, much of his writing is based on secondary sources; hence he might have been less shocked at Cushing's confession concerning the paucity of his primary sources that one might expect. Moreover, Wrong's style was self-consciously literary, and he leaned more towards heroic exploits and battles than economic or social analyses. We know that he found both Cushing's superb prose and his celebratory aims in the *Life* highly commendable, for he said as much in a letter to Lady Osler now preserved in the Osler Library Archives and Manuscripts Acc. 326. This letter is interesting as well in that it reveals something about Wrong's friendship with Osler, to which the Cushing letter alludes.

Durham House
near Port Hope
Ontario
Sept. 22, 1925

My Dear Lady Osler:

A letter to you has long been in my mind for I have wished to tell you how much we have delighted in the "Life" and how vividly we see your part in helping to achieve the wonderful work which you and Sir William accomplished. It is an inspiring story. At first the two volumes looked formidable but my wife said to me yesterday that she would not have had them shorter by one word. Neither has she nor have I any technical knowledge, yet we read the volumes from cover to cover and would gladly have had them longer. The volumes will have an enduring influence. I believe that centuries from now this story of a great physician will be retold over and over again and will be a source of inspiration to generations unborn. Do not think that I am pitching this in too high a key. The combination of nobility and simplicity of character with scientific insight and great achievement is rare. I doubt whether any other physician who ever lived was so much beloved by so many people. He was known intimately in three countries which is in itself, I fancy, unique. A couple of months ago the little society of Physicians in this and the adjoining county (Northumberland and Durham) asked me to give an address at their annual meeting. It hardly seemed to be in my line, but I realized that I had a mine in the "Life" and I spoke to them for an hour on the beloved physician and his principles of conduct. These country doctors read but little, but I hope I sent some of them to the book and they listened eagerly when I spoke of Sir William's stern condemnation of professional gossip and backbiting....

Apparently Osler had cared for Wrong's son Murray (1889-1928), also a historian, for he goes on to say that "we probably owed Murray's life to Sir William and I suppose his care and kindness, out of friendship only in this instance represent one of a thousand

like instances..." It would seem as well that the Wrongs and the Oslers met during summer holidays at Murray Bay (Pointe au Pic); the latter part of Wrong's letter tells of a fortnight spent recently in that village, and relates the doings of what are evidently mutual acquaintances. "You and Sir William," he says, "are often talked about and I saw the "Life" in a number of the houses." He speaks as well of entertaining some young students from Trinity College School, including Palmer Howard.

These letters from one historian to, and about, another, shed fresh light on the admiring, indeed passionate response of many readers -- not all of them physicians -- to Cushing's biography. What is intriguing is that Cushing's first audience seems hardly to have been able to separate the biography from its subject. The first sentence of Wrong's letter to Lady Osler is especially telling in this respect, as it slides from praise of Cushing's *Life* into praise of Osler's life. I have often contended that Cushing wrote his *Life*, not for posterity, but for the people who had known and loved Osler during his lifetime. If this hypothesis is valid -- and the reaction of George Mackinnon Wrong would appear to support it -- then the disappearance of the last representatives of this generation would signal the need for a new *Life of Osler*.

Faith Wallis

**TWO OUTSTANDING GIFTS TO
THE OSLER LIBRARY**

Recently, two Friends of the Osler Library have donated important rare books to our collection. Dr. H. Rocke Robertson, himself a surgeon, gave us a French translation of the famous surgical compendium of Lorenz Heister (1683-1758): *Institutions de chirurgie, où l'on traite dans un ordre clair et nouveau... les appareils et les bandages*. (Paris: Didot, 1771). In two volumes, and illustrated with engravings of Heister's rather Baroque instruments and bandaging techniques, it forms a valuable addition to our collection of the works of this influential practitioner.

When Dr. Edward Stevens of Kenosha, Wisconsin, received our "Adopt a Book" appeal, he was immediately attracted to the volume of Hardwick's *Science Gossip* containing Osler's first publication -- not because he wished to adopt it, but because he had recently seen a pristine copy advertised in a rare book dealer's catalogue. He purchased the volume and donated it to the Library. It now keeps company with our original, but battered *Gossip*, which will be "retired" in favour of Dr. Stevens' sturdier tome. This alternate conservation strategy provides a "reading copy" of a seriously damaged book, while the original book is retained, but exempted from active use. We thank Dr. Stevens for his imaginative and very practical initiative.

Faith Wallis

**OSLER LIBRARY FELLOWS
FOR 1992**

The Osler Library Fellowships Committee had announced the winners of the 1992 Osler Library Fellowships. The Research Fellowship has been awarded to Prof. André Paradis of the Centre d'études québécoises of the Université de Québec à Trois-Rivières. Prof. Paradis is studying the beginnings of the organization of psychiatric practice in Quebec from 1890 to 1920, and in particular, the reception of psychiatric ideas from Europe and America into the Quebec milieu. Who were the transmitters of these ideas? What concepts did they import, and how were they assimilated? Prof. Paradis will be exploring these questions through the medium of contemporary personal narratives, as well as the professional periodical literature. Prof. Paradis has already published numerous interpretive studies and bibliographic guides about historic Quebec medicine.

David Fisman, a second year medical student at the University of Western Ontario, is the winner of this year's Student Fellowship. His latent interest in medical history was roused to active life by a visit to the Osler Library last summer. "Creative snooping" in the Library resulted in an essay on "The Symbolism of the Serpent and Staff". At the same time, he discovered Thomas Brien's *The Pisse Prophet*, published in London in 1658 (B.O. 2125), a diatribe against dishonesty in contemporary medical practice, particularly in uroscopy. Mr. Fisman proposes to spend a month at the Library studying the state of diagnosis, medical practice, and medical politics in Stuart England which forms the context of Brien's exposé.

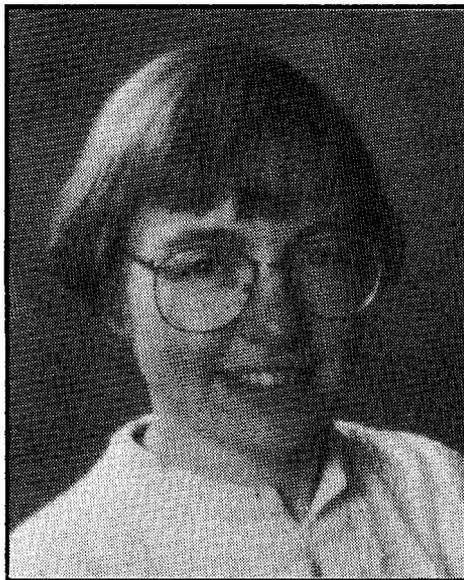
The Osler Library Fellowships are awarded annually, and are supported by the endowment fund of the Class of Medicine 1936, and by the Faculty of Medicine. The competition for 1993 will close on November 30, 1992. Further information on application procedures can be obtained by writing to the Library.

Faith Wallis

**DR FAITH WALLIS TAKES
UP A NEW POST**

Dr Faith Wallis, the Osler Librarian, has resigned from her position as administrative head of the Osler Library, effective May 31. She has been offered, and has accepted, a tenure-track position as professor of the history of medicine in the Department of Humanities and Social Studies in Medicine at McGill, with a cross-appointment to the Department of History. Her new office is just off the Mezzanine -or as she puts it, "in the attic of the Osler Library".

Dr Wallis came to the Osler Library in January 1985 as Assistant History of Medicine Librarian. In March 1986 she was appointed History of Medicine Librarian, and



Dr. Faith Wallis, Osler Librarian

in November 1990 received the title of Osler Librarian from the Board of Curators. Since 1986 she has held teaching appointments in the Department of Humanities and Social Studies in Medicine and in the Department of History, and has published studies on medieval science. Though deeply committed to her anomalous role as scholar-librarian, she has found the scholar side of the equation pulling her ever more strongly into the academic sector. She looks forward to using the Library which she has been privileged to direct for eight years, and to writing about its books and manuscripts. Teaching and research will now occupy most her time, but she will continue to edit the Osler Library Newsletter, and to assist scholars and Oslerians in using the Library's resources.

A search committee has been struck to search for a successor to Dr Wallis. In the meantime, Mr. David Crawford, Life Sciences Area Librarian, will serve as Acting History of Medicine Librarian.

**FRIENDS OF
THE OSLER LIBRARY**

The appeal to the Friends for the 1991-92 academic year concluded at the end of May. The Library gratefully acknowledges the support it has received from Friends, both old and new, who have responded to the appeal for funds this year. Over the year, 274 Friends have given a total of approximately \$22,015. Most of the contributions have come from Friends in Canada and the United States of America. However, very welcome contributions have come also from Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, Germany, Japan, Switzerland, and United Kingdom.

The names of Friends whose contributions were received after January 31, 1992 are listed below. The appeal for the 1992-93 academic year will be made in the October Newsletter.

- † American Osler Society
- * André Bouthillette
- † John Brennan
- † Rea A. Brown
- Fernande K. Cantero
- † Earl M. Cooperman
- † Audrey Copping
- Martin M. Cummings
- † Anthony R. Dobell
- Donald E. Douglas
- † William R. W. Fitz
- Esther and Leonard Geller
- † William C. Gibson
- † Douglas Glasgow
- * Pierre Gloor
- * Alan B. Gold
- Paul M. Gross
- * Rosemary Haddad
- * K. Iwama
- † John T. Kelsall
- † Holly Korda
- * Michael J. Lepore
- * Jennifer J. Marler
- † J. F. Meakins
- † Campbell R. Osler
- Richard Osler
- * Edgar T. Peer
- † Robert Z Perkins
- † Charles G. Roland
- * Thomas M. Sinclair
- William P. Stoneman
- † Joseph Stratford
- † Michael R. Terrin
- * Barbara R. Tunis

- * Supporting
- † Patron

Editorial Committee for the Newsletter:
Faith Wallis, Osler Librarian and Editor;
Edward H. Bensley, Honorary Osler Librarian and Consulting Editor;
Wayne LeBel, Assistant History of Medicine Librarian and Assistant Editor;
Lily Szczygiel, Editorial Assistant.

Legal Deposit 2/1992 ISSN 0085-4557