



OSLER LIBRARY NEWSLETTER

McGill University, Montreal, Canada

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THE OSLER-BUCKE RELATIONSHIP AND THE WHITMAN CLUTTER



I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin, Hoping to cease not till death.

Leaves of Grass, 2nd ed., 1856.

Walt Whitman did continue to write poems and edit and reorder his works until his death, all in new editions of *Leaves of Grass* ⁽¹⁾, although he did so through many years of imperfect health. In January 1873, Whitman, then living in Washington, suffered the first of a series of strokes occasioned, he and his friends believed, by an illness picked up years before when nursing soldiers in camp hospitals during the War Between the States. By the summer of 1873, Whitman's health had not improved. Thus the fifty-five year old poet, worshipped by a small band of intellectuals and idealogues on both sides of the Atlantic, and mocked for his self-described "barbaric yawp" by most critics and readers, had been forced to move to Camden, New Jersey, a nondescript industrial and shipping town where his brother lived.

There, a ferry-ride away from wealthy, cultivated Philadelphia, the poet would hold his (often lonely) court. And there, through the years, Whitman would be attended by two McGill-trained Canadian physicians: Richard Maurice Bucke and Wil-

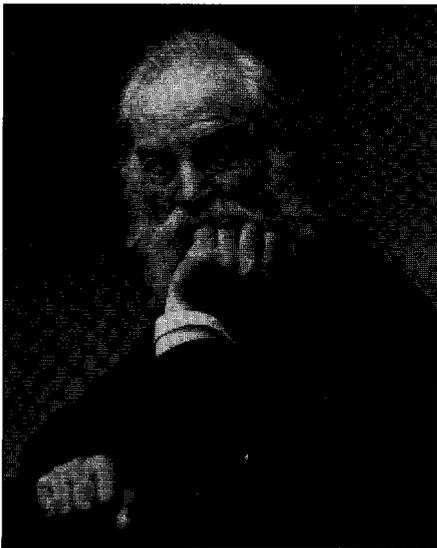
liam Osler. Dr. Bucke (1837-1902) was a respected practitioner and superintendent of the asylum for the insane in London, Ontario. However, he had first come to Camden in 1877 on a personal mission — to search out the poet whose lines in *Leaves of Grass*, read years before, had echoed and further inspired his own mystic vision of the universe. From that meeting on, Bucke was to assume several functions for the charismatic Whitman, including biographer and active defender. However, it was his role as the poet's medical advisor that is of initial interest here. For it is in this capacity that Bucke called upon his respected colleague William Osler, recently ensconced in Philadelphia as Professor of Medicine at University of Pennsylvania, to look in on Whitman. Osler agreed, and attended Whitman intermittently, alone and with Bucke, until 1889, when he left for Johns Hopkins.

The state of Whitman's health has been amply explored, as has, for that matter, the poet's attitudes towards his two Canadian doctors. ⁽²⁾ What has not been fully nor fairly treated is Osler's view of Bucke, and the strengthened nature of their relationship, cemented by their work together on the Whitman case. ⁽³⁾ These are the areas I will explore here. Since much germane information is to be found in *Bibliotheca Osleriana* 7660, and the selectively reproduced sections therefrom -- very damaging to Bucke -- found in Cushing's *Life of Osler*, an examination of these two sources will be my starting point.

Bibliotheca Osleriana 7660 contains twelve pages of notes for Osler's projected lecture on Walt Whitman, and typescripts of related letters. As Cushing recounts, in 1919, the centenary of Whitman's birth, Sir William was asked by two literary groups to speak about his encounters with Whitman twenty years previously: one was Sir Walter Raleigh's English class at Oxford; the second was a group of English admirers of Whitman at London's City Temple. Though himself in ill health, Sir William accepted these invitations, and spent his final summer vacation at St. Bre-lade's in Jersey with "two writing-tables prepared, one for the Nervous System [a revision of the chapter in his textbook] and one for Walt Whitman". ⁽⁴⁾

Osler did not live to polish or deliver the lecture he had entitled "A Centenary Address: Walt Whitman, with Personal Reminiscences". Nor did he have a chance to reread his pages and note how large a portion of his Whitman talk had been devoted to "his friend Maurice Bucke of London, Ont." ⁽⁵⁾ who had first asked him to look in on Whitman. And Osler could certainly not have anticipated that Cushing in his *Life of Osler* would excerpt the one passage from B.O. 7660 that presents Bucke in his least dignified state, that of mystical Whitman enthusiast in the process of giving witness.

Of the two men Bucke interested me more. Though a hero-worshipper, it was a new experience in my life to witness such an absolute idolatry. Where



Walt Whitman, as the Good Gray Poet, photographed shortly after the Civil War. (Collection of the author)

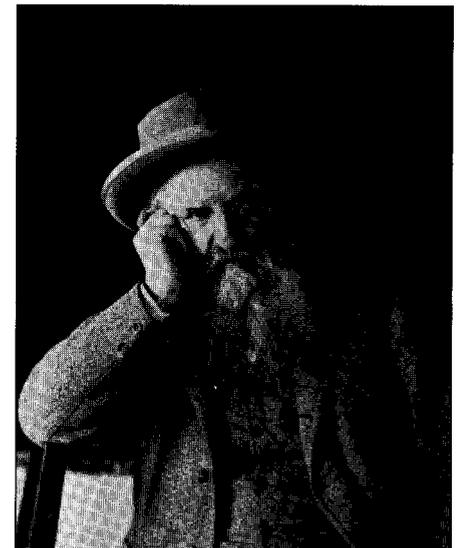
Hurrah for positive science! Long live exact demonstration!

Fetch stonecrop and mix it with cedar and branches of lilac;

This is the lexicographer or chemist . . . this made a grammar of the old cartouches, These mariners put the ship through dangerous unknown seas,

This is the geologist, and this works with the scalpel, and this is a mathematician.

Gentlemen I receive you, and attach and clasp hands with you, The facts are useful and real . . . they are not my dwelling I enter by them to an area of the dwelling.



Richard Maurice Bucke (Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Western Ontario Library)

my blurred vision saw only an old man, full of common sense and kindly feelings, Bucke felt himself in the presence of one of the world's great prophets. One evening after dinner at the Rittenhouse Club with Dr. Chapin, Dr. Tyson, Dr. J.K. Mitchell and a few others who I knew would appreciate him, I drew Bucke on to tell the story of Whitman's influence. The fervid disciple, who talks like [Chaerephon] in the [Apology] is not often met with in these matter-of-fact days. It was an experience to hear an elderly man — looking a venerable seer — with absolute abandonment tell how 'Leaves of Grass' had meant for him spiritual enlightenment, a new power in life, new joys in a new existence on a plane higher than he had ever hoped to reach. All this with the accompanying physical exaltation expressed by dilated pupils and intensity of utterance that were embarrassing to uninitiated friends. This incident illustrates the type of influence exercised by Whitman on his disciples — a cult of a type such as no other literary man of our generation has been the object...⁽⁶⁾

This portrait of a wild-eyed Dr. Bucke shows a less complimentary side of Osler as well — that of a somewhat cruel jokester; for Osler had set up that dinner party at Philadelphia's Rittenhouse Club to put Bucke's bizarre behaviour on view for the amusement of his fellow physicians -- Whitman admirers perhaps, but not Whitman devotees.

However, in another part of the original manuscript of Osler's centenary address, a very different assessment of Bucke is found, one that makes the friendship or collegiality between these two prominent Canadian doctors more understandable. Here Osler acknowledges that Bucke is a mystic, but in his words, "a mystic with one foot planted firmly in mother earth".⁽⁷⁾ The professional part of that earthly stance that Osler deeply respects is Bucke's work as superintendent of the Asylum for the Insane in London.

Here he (Bucke) carried out more successfully than at any institution I have visited the non-restraint method of treatment. It was a revelation, indeed a unique experience — to pass from ward to ward from block to block without a key. Neither bolt nor bar, nor padded room!⁽⁸⁾

Even as medical men, Osler and Bucke manifested differences of temperament. Thus Osler, always sanguine with patients, felt that "Bucke was a bit too solicitous about Whitman's health..."⁽⁹⁾ Nonetheless, after his 1889 move to Baltimore, Osler continued to confer with Bucke by mail and offer support as Bucke agonized over his patient's suffering. In a letter to Whitman's secretary Horace Traubel, dated January 1889, Bucke reports that Whitman had fi-

nally responded favourably to Bucke's persistent suggestion that the bedridden poet move to a location where he would receive better medical care. Bucke then states:

I wrote to Osler at Johns Hopkins asking him whether W. could be received there as a pay patient — what the rates would be & c. I have just received Osler's answer this afternoon saying there would be no difficulty about W's reception and that the pay for everything would be about \$25 a week.⁽¹⁰⁾

But Whitman changed his mind about moving to Baltimore, and the matter was dropped.

After Whitman's death in March, 1892, the relationship between Bucke and Osler continued, and indeed, grew richer and more personal. Bucke's administrative assistant in London, Dr. Charles Sippi, recorded the following events in his 1896

1992 in the centenary of the death of the great American poet Walt Whitman, whom Osler attended during his years in Philadelphia. It is also the 90th anniversary of the death of an almost forgotten Canadian "alienist" (i.e. psychiatrist) and writer, Richard Maurice Bucke, who became the aging Whitman's biographer and publicist, as well as his physician. It was Dr. Bucke who arranged the Whitman consult for Osler. Helene Berman Fallen, the Hamilton, Ontario-based author of the lead article for this issue of the Newsletter, is an independent researcher and radio journalist, associated with the History of Medicine programme at McMaster University. She has conducted research on Bucke, and has written a CBC radio documentary on Anne Wilkinson, the Canadian poet who was William Osler's niece.

diary, now preserved in the Bucke Collection at the University of Western Ontario:

Feb. 7. Dr. Osler of Johns Hopkins University Balt. was expected here today to go to Sarnia with Dr. Bucke but he missed connections at Philadelphia and will not be here until 2 o'clock tomorrow.

Feb. 8. Dr. Bucke went to Sarnia this morning with Dr. Osler of Baltimore to see Mr. R.S. Gurd.

Feb. 10. Dr. Will Osler agreed in the diagnosis made by Dr. Bucke in the case of R.S. Gurd & gave no hope of recovery

It would have been a very long and cold winter's journey from Baltimore to a city sixty miles from Toronto, and thence to another town half that distance away. Yet Osler graciously made the trip to consult in the case of one R.S. Gurd, who happened to be an in-law of his friend, Maurice Bucke.

It may be that the greatest bond between Bucke and Osler was books -- reading them, writing them, and above all, collecting them. Both were avid readers of contemporary literature, the classics, philosophy, and the newest scientific treatises of their age. Both wrote articles and books,⁽¹¹⁾ and most significantly for the argument of this essay, both were prone to what Cushing in his biography terms Osler's "infection with the bibliomania".⁽¹²⁾ To grasp the relevance of this "disease", we must return to Osler's memories of his first visit to Whitman, recorded in B.O. 7660, and transcribed in Cushing's biography.

After the manner of a well-trained physician, Osler takes careful note of the environment of his patient, the simple propriety of Whitman's house, the cheerful competence of his housekeeper, and so forth. But what he dwells upon most particularly is the state of the poet's study.

I have seen what the tidy housewife calls a 'clutter', but nothing to compare with the front room, ground floor of No. 328 Mickle Street. At the corner, the head and upper part of a man were visible — everywhere else, covering the floor, the chairs and the table, were, to use his own description 'heaps of books, manuscripts, memoranda, scissorings, proof-sheets, pamphlets, newspapers, old and new magazines, mysterious literary bundles tied up with stout strings'. The magazines and newspapers, piled higher than the desk, covered the floor so completely that I had to pick my way by the side of the wall of the room to get to the desk.⁽¹³⁾

After Whitman's death, Bucke was named one of Whitman's three literary executors, and until his accidental death in 1902, he was the most productive one. He collected and edited two posthumous Whitman publications, *Calamus: A Series of Letters Written During the Years 1868-1889 to a Young Friend* and *The Wounddresser: A Series of Letters Written from the Hospital in Washington during the War of the Rebellion*. These works, certainly glanced at by Osler, brought new admirers to Whitman, and particularly in the last twenty-five years, have been responsible for much groundbreaking work by Whitman scholars. However, among the surviving correspondence between Osler and Bucke is a note from Osler, dated September 15, 1899, concerning another book, *Notes and Fragments*, Bucke's self-published presentation, organized and annotated, of materials which Osler had described as "clutter", and which had come to Bucke as Whitman's literary executor. Osler wrote:

Dear Bucke:-
I enclose the five dollars, though I have not yet seen the Fragment, as I have only just returned this morning. I have found several enthusiastic Waltites in England.

I hope you are well and happy.
Sincerely yours,
Wm. Osler⁽¹⁴⁾

Though still not a Waltite in terms of literary taste (" 'twas not for my pampered palate, accustomed to Plato and Shakespeare and Shelley and Keats"⁽¹⁵⁾), Osler had evidently become somewhat hooked on collecting Whitmaniana. In 1900, he queried Bucke about "anything good in any of the early Whitman editions".⁽¹⁶⁾

In 1919, Osler was busy organizing his library which he planned to bequeath to McGill. Thus books and bibliographical issues were much on his mind. His summer work on the Whitman centenary talk brought back his experiences with Whitman and his "clutter", and more deeply, memories of his exceptional friend Bucke, who had died shortly after the publication of his *magnus opus*, *Cosmic Consciousness*. Osler may have been using his copy of Bucke's Notes and Fragments along with Bucke's Walt Whitman as an aid in writing his address.⁽¹⁷⁾ In any case, displaying one the last flashes of his collecting spirit, Osler seems to have made a bid to locate, and perhaps acquire the "clutter". Inserted in B.O. 7660 is a letter, dated October 1919, from J.W. Wallace, a member of the inner circle of English Whitmanities Bucke had helped to establish years earlier. It reveals that Osler had become interested in the whereabouts of the "clutter".

I am sorry that my answer to your questions about Dr. Bucke's Whitman material must be so unsatisfactory. His family shared none of his literary interests, and after his death all his books and papers were stored away in boxes and apparently remain there still!

In fact, most of Bucke's massive Whitman collection, distributed among his children, did not become available until 1935, when it was auctioned. By then, Whitman's reputation as THE great American poet was emerging. Through the initial buyer and subsequent resales, the major Whitman collections, especially those at Duke University, the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library, and the Library of Congress in Washington, have been stocked.

It is tempting to speculate that had his own death not intervened, Osler would have followed up the clue in Wallace's letter, and made a personal appeal to the Bucke family for the Whitman papers. And if Osler had managed to acquire them, a tantalizing question arises: Where would he have placed them? In the Osler Library? At an American institution? In a suitable repository in London, Ontario, in memory of his Canadian friend and colleague, Whitman champion and caretaker, Maurice Bucke?

NOTES

1. Nine authorized editions of *Leaves of Grass* were published, from Whitman's startling 1855 edition, a 95 page, 12-section work with a 12 page preface, self-published, to the 438 page so-called *Deathbed Edition* of 1892. See Gay Wilson Allen's *A Reader's Guide to Walt Whitman* (1970) Chapter III for more information.

2. The Whitman biographies by Gay Wilson Allen (1955) and Justin Kaplan (1980) vividly present the ailing Whitman. Allen's biography includes the autopsy report, printed originally in *In Re Walt Whitman* (1893), a collection of essays edited by Whitman's three literary executors: Bucke, Horace Traubel and Thomas Harned. Resources for Whitman's view of Osler and Bucke include all the volumes of Horace Traubel's *With Whitman in Camden* (see #10) and two articles by William White: "Walt Whitman on Osler: He is a Great Man", reprinted from *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, vol. 15, No. 1, January, 1944 and "Whitman's Dr. Bucke" *Walt Whitman Review* 23.4 (December 1977).

3. George Herbert Stevenson's paper, "Bucke and Osler: A Personality Study" which was reprinted in *The Canadian Medical Association Journal*, vol. 44, 183-188, 1941 provides valuable clues to the Osler-Bucke relationship.

4. Cushing, H. *The Life of Sir William Osler*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925. Vol. II, 1352.

5. Cushing, H. *op.cit.*, Vol. I, 264.

6. Cushing, H. *op.cit.*, Vol. I, 266.

7. Osler, W. *Bibliotheca Osleriana* Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1969, #7660, 3.

8. Osler, W. *op.cit.*, 3.

9. Osler, W. *op.cit.*, 5.

10. Traubel, Horace, *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, September 15, 1889 -- July 6, 1890 (6), ed. by Gertrude Traubel and William White. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982, 272.

11. A listing of Bucke's books and his papers and articles on medical matters, as well as other subjects (including Walt Whitman) have been included in Richard Maurice Bucke, the 1977 catalogue edited by Mary Ann Jameson and published by The Libraries, The University of Western Ontario, London, Canada. Present readers would find two of Bucke's books *Man's Moral Nature* (1879) and *Cosmic Consciousness* (1901) have been fairly continuously reprinted. Both are based on an ameliorative evolutionary model: the first positing a theory of the improvement through time of man's emotional (moral) nature, based in the great sympathetic nervous system; and the second, still in print and variously treated by several Canadian scholars including Ramsay Cook, Cyril Greenland, Artem Lozinsky, Sam Shortt, suggests by "case studies" an increase through recorded time of individuals exhibiting a fifth sense, "cosmic consciousness", either partially or fully. Osler's good friend and eminent psychologist William James included Bucke's thesis in his *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902).

12. Cushing, H. *op.cit.*, Vol. I, 579.

13. Cushing, H. *op.cit.*, Vol. I, 264.

14. Stevenson, G.H., *Bucke and Osler: A Personality Study*, 12. Read at the seventy-first meeting of the Canadian Medical Association, Section of Historical Medicine, Toronto on June 19, 1940 and reprinted as indicated at note #3.

15. Cushing, H. *op.cit.*, Vol. I, 265.

16. Stevenson, G.H. *op.cit.*,

17. Notes and Fragments was not included in *Bibliotheca Osleriana*. Like most of the purely literary works in Osler's library, it was probably given away or sold following Lady Osler's death.

PASSAGES

We are deeply saddened by the passing away of Dr. Philip Eibel on October 5, 1992. Dr. Eibel was a long-time habitué of the Osler Library and a tireless and talented medical historian. Only a few months ago, he was using our collection of Paris theses to research the history of circumcision. He

was a frequent contributor of historical articles to medical journals, and to Jewish reviews such as *Midstream*. We will miss seeing him poring over the "newly received" shelves in the Osler Library, and regaling us with his latest projects and opinions.

Another sad passage to record is that of Dr. F.C. ("Hank") McIntosh, long-time chair of the Department of Physiology in this University, and an assiduous historian of 20th century physiology. Dr. McIntosh has left his files of primary research and historical documentation to the Osler Library, and these are already beginning to attract scholarly interest. His stimulating inquiries and provocative observations — to say nothing of those Physiology laboratory oyster parties — will always remain precious memories.

RECENT VISITORS TO THE OSLER LIBRARY

The Osler Library was the happy beneficiary of a certain spill-over from the Congrès international de philosophie médiévale held in Ottawa during the last week of August, when scholars of international renown took the opportunity to come to Montreal to see the Library's medieval manuscripts. Dr. Charles Burnett of the Warburg Institute, University of London, not only passed a morning in the company of our ancient scientific and medical books, but alerted a friend, Dr. Italo Ronca of the University of Pretoria, to the fact that the Library holds a most unusual alchemical manuscript. This is *Bibl. Osl. 480*, the pseudo-Avicenna *Liber Abuali Abincine*. Dr. Ronca, an expert on medieval alchemy, promptly moved into the Osler Library for three days to pore over this unique manuscript and consult our reference works on the history of alchemy. He promises to return, a promise which we hope shall soon be fulfilled.

On September 28, the Osler Library was delighted to welcome a very distinguished visitor, Dr. Mirko Grmek. One of the most productive and diverse medical historians of recent decades, Dr. Grmek held, until his recent retirement, the chair of medical history at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* in Paris. He is the author and editor of numerous books, of which the best known are *Les maladies à l'aube de la civilisation* (1983; translated into English as *Diseases in the Ancient Greek World, Raisonnement expérimental et recherches toxicologiques chez Claude Bernard* (1973), and most recently, *Histoire du sida* (1990; translated as *History of AIDS*). Prof. Grmek was at McGill to deliver the *Astra Lectures in Ethics* at the Centre for Medicine, Ethics and Law; he also spoke to Croatian cultural groups, and was the guest of honour at a special dinner organized by Mrs. Zlata Blazina, Research Associate of the Osler Library. Dr. Grmek divided his time almost equally between looking at our medieval manuscripts and learning how to use the computerized Library System catalogue! It was difficult to say which seemed to delight him more.

NEW COLLECTIONS DEVELOPMENT GRANT FOR THE OSLER LIBRARY

Over the past decade, the Osler Library has been awarded three Collections Development Grants by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, all for the acquisition of primary historic works on the social context of medicine. The first (1984-1985) was limited to France in the 19th century, the second to Western Europe from the 16th to the 19th centuries, and the third to North America — but all shared a common topical definition. Books were purchased which reflected issues where the medical profession and medical practice impinged upon government, social policy and planning, political action, and the legal system. They covered subjects such as public health, in as far as physicians attempted to persuade political leaders to enact policies involving disease control and sanitation; legal medicine, i.e. the involvement of the medical profession in defining and detecting crime; institutional organization and public recognition of the medical profession; and popular medical education, i.e. the drive by the medical profession to extend its influence over the public consciousness of health issues. However, in the course of building up our social medicine collections with the assistance of these grants, we soon became aware of the special position of infectious disease within this constellation of subjects.

Infectious disease, whether transmitted directly from human to human or conveyed by vectors in the human environment, is fundamentally a social phenomenon. Medical efforts to allay such diseases invariably stimulate criticism of social institutions and practices, or of elements within society, which are identified as causes of the disease (etiology). They also invoke prescriptions concerning public policy or social behaviour, or proposals for governmental coercion (e.g. universal vaccination) as a means by which society can prevent infectious disease (prophylaxis). Finally, they create a demand for strategies for the social management of outbreaks of infectious disease, including coercive measures such as quarantine (control). These social issues are the focus of some of the most interesting and topical scholarship in contemporary medical history; it is also a subject of immediate concern in our own society, as the AIDS crisis focusses our attention on the ways in which discussions of medical etiology, prophylaxis and control can be socially and politically manipulated.

The new grant of \$20,000 will enable the Library to acquire, over a period of two years, primary works published in western Europe and North America between 1600 and 1900 on the etiology, prophylaxis and control of infectious disease. The chronological frame was chosen in order to include the final major outbreaks of Europe's most long-lived epidemic, plague, as well as the careers of "new" diseases such as Asiatic cholera (introduced in 1828); the closing date of 1900 marks the era of bacte-

riological and therapeutic discoveries which would transform the fight against infectious diseases.

Communicable disease is a major collections priority for the Osler Library. Thanks to Sir William's collection, we already possess many of the classics of infectious disease literature. Our aim with this new grant is to deepen and diversify this classic core.

Faith Wallis

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

With each passing year, the contributions of the Friends of the Osler Library make possible an increasingly diverse array of purchases and possibilities for the Library. The major priority is, of course, new acquisitions, particularly acquisition of rare or costly works which would, without the Friends' generosity, be beyond our means. This year, outstanding historic works purchased with funds from the Friends of the Osler Library include G. Mauran, *Essai sur les maladies qui attaquent le plus communément les gens de mer* (Marseille, 1766), C.N. Le Cat, *Traité de la couleur de la peau humaine... de celle des nègres en particulier* (Amsterdam, 1765 - an interesting chapter in the early history of racism), Anne Charles de Lorry's *De melancholia et morbis melancholicis* (Paris, 1765 — probably the most important psychiatric treatise published in France in the 18th century), and a classic of physiognomy, *The Works of Professor [Peter] Camper, on the Connection between the Science of Anatomy and the Arts of Drawing, Painting, Statuary etc. etc.* (London, 1794). I would like to draw special attention to the Le Cat volume, because it supports the research on the history of race consciousness in Enlightenment France being conducted by Prof. Pierre Boule of the History Department and his students. The Friends may take special pride in knowing that their books are not only adding to the patrimony of the Osler Library but are also directly stimulating the use of the Library by scholars and students.

Acquisitions are only one chapter in the Friends' story, however. Friends' funds have enabled Library staff to attend conferences, paid student help for diverse Library projects, contributed to the elegant new shelving in the Wellcome Camera Mezzanine, and this year, have underwritten the production of the second volume of *Osler Library Studies in the History of Medicine*, Dr. Richard Golden's *Oslerian Verse*, which will shortly be rolling off the presses. Without the Friends, of course, this Newsletter could not be printed and mailed to its 1500 readers, nor could countless small, but necessary items not provided for in our regular budget be purchased.

Whether it is a big-ticket rare book, or a unglamorous, but crucially important piece of computer equipment, the Friends' gifts to the Library are essential to our survival and growth. I offer you all, simply and very sincerely, profound thanks on behalf of the Li-

brary for your imaginative generosity. With this issue of the Newsletter, we are launching our appeal for 1992. Your help and support are now, perhaps more than ever, vital to us.

Faith Wallis

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