

OSLER'S INFLUENCE ON THE LIBRARY OF THE  
MEDICAL AND CHIRURGICAL FACULTY OF  
THE STATE OF MARYLAND

By MARCIA C. NOYES, Librarian

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Associations of Dr. Osler are so interwoven with the library [212] of the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty that what we have become is, in reality, but an expression of what we felt he would have us be.

The name of Osler is writ large in the history of the library from the time of his first connection with it in 1890; and the impression made by his character on the lives of those with whom he came in contact has been a powerful influence for the betterment of medicine in Maryland and in the upbuilding of the state society and its library.

Dr. Osler was elected a member of our Library Committee in 1892 in which year the committee reported difficulties, financial and otherwise, in the management of this "most valued and noble inheritance." Although never serving as chairman, that he lent himself to the surmounting of these difficulties we know, and what was accomplished between 1892 and 1905, his tenure of office on the Library Committee, is given, in part, herewith.\* From a collection of a few thousand old books in 1892 it grew to 14,590 volumes in 1905, and has grown steadily ever since.

The library, which dates from 1830, had been partially revived in 1881 and was housed in rooms in the basement of the old Maryland Historical Society in 1885; but it was Dr. Osler's interest which brought about its renaissance and the purchase of and its removal to the home at 847 N. Eutaw

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\* When abroad for his annual outing, Dr. Osler always had the needs of our Library in mind, and we owe many of its greatest treasures to his interest. Some of these were a direct gift from him, and others selected for purchase on the Frick Fund.

[212] Street (Hamilton Terrace) in 1895. After a year without proper supervision it was owing to Dr. Osler, who personally saw to it, that the Library Committee employed a trained worker and the present librarian took charge. To him we owe the founding of the Charles Frick section of the library, in 1896, which was made possible by the generosity of Messrs. William F. and Frank Frick; and the establishment of the Book and Journal Club at about the same time. These funds gave the Library a definite income for the first time in its history.

Dr. Osler was president of the Faculty in 1896-1897, and in his presidential address, April, 1897, in outlining the purpose of the Book and Journal Club, and of the Frick memorial said: "I envy Charles Frick the good fortune to go down to the future generations in this Faculty with his name linked to an important section of our library. Posthumously and by proxy, as it were, thus to carry on, though dead, the work he was interested in while living, is the nearest approach a man can make to cheating the great enemy, and in Charles Frick's case it is in a measure a compensation for the untimeliness of his taking off." He also spoke of the approaching centennial as follows: "We can try in the centennial year to obtain a proper endowment for the Faculty from our friends among the citizens. We shall need a larger hall, more in keeping with the rank and work of the profession of this city—quarters as complete as our brethren enjoy in Philadelphia and New York. And an endowment yielding a few thousand dollars annually is absolutely essential for the proper development of the library." At the centennial of the Faculty in 1899 he gave the first thousand dollars toward such an endowment fund; and it may safely be said that it was principally due to his influence that the Charles M. Ellis bequest was made in 1910.

It was because of the widespread desire to honor Dr. Osler that the present home of the library, at 1211 Cathedral Street, became a fact in 1909; and because of a further expression of [213] this desire that the Osler Testimonial Fund for the purchase, in his name, of books on medicine was presented to us in 1917. It is singularly fitting that his name should be linked for all time with that of the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty and

its library, for he delighted so keenly in the phrasing of the old title—the chirurgical, so hard for the uninitiated to pronounce—and in the usage of the word faculty instead of society. The development of the library, to its fullest extent, interested him beyond measure, for he was not only a lover, but a user of books, and he insisted that his students should



learn the art. The familiar slip bearing his reference was presented almost daily by some one of them, and our reading room on Saturday afternoons became a rendezvous for students and physicians who thought to meet him there to seek his advice. In those days, the pausing of a hansom at the door, if followed immediately by a cheery whistle, presaged his advent to the initiated. Hardly a Saturday passed without

[213] Dr. Osler coming to scan the shelves containing the new journals and to browse among the books to be found in the Charles Frick Reading Room.

Akin to his interest in books is his interest in medical libraries in general, and he was intimately familiar with and always a welcome guest at the library of the Surgeon General's Office, the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, the New York Academy of Medicine, the Boston Medical Library and the library at McGill University, as well as the libraries in Baltimore and many of the smaller medical libraries elsewhere, some of which he fostered. He was not only familiar with the books in these collections, but he knew intimately the catalogers and workers who do not usually come in contact with the readers, as well as the librarians in charge.

This interest found expression in the founding, in conjunction with Dr. George M. Gould, of Philadelphia, of the Medical Library Association in 1898. Owing to his generosity our library was a member from the beginning, and has become an influence in the medical world because of this membership and our connection with the exchange of the association.

No one man has so left his imprint on the libraries of two continents as has Sir William Osler, and a quotation from his address "Books and Men" delivered in 1901 at the opening of the new building of the Boston Medical Library, at 8 The Fenway, sums up what his example has meant to this library and Faculty:

It is hard for me to speak of the value of libraries in terms which would not seem exaggerated. Books have been my delight these thirty years, and from them I have received incalculable benefits. . . . For the teacher and the worker a great library such as this is indispensable. They must know the world's best work and know it at once. . . . For the general practitioner a well-used library is one of the few correctives of the premature senility which is so apt to overtake him. Self-centered, self-taught, he leads a solitary life, and unless his everyday experience is controlled by careful reading or by the attrition of a medical society it soon ceases to be of the slightest value and becomes a mere accretion of isolated facts, without correlation.