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EDITORIAL

IN the earliest years of the present century, shortly after Randolph Churchill's death, Lord Rosebery declined a request to "write something about him," on the grounds that he was then too near his time, and that any attempt to write the biography of such a fiercely controversial politician soon after his death must needs partake of the nature of a party pamphlet.

The interval which has elapsed between the death of Osler and the appearance of Prof. Harvey Cushing's *Life* is of just about the same duration as that which elapsed between the death of the elder Churchill and the publication of Winston's brilliant tribute to his father's memory. Who knows, had Osler's son, Revere, survived, with his strong devotion to all that was choicest in English literature, if another equally brilliant filial tribute would not have enriched our biographical treasury? *Dis aliter visum.*

Dr. Cushing, however, has had no such difficulties to contend with as had the political biographer. That Osler's life would be brilliantly written those familiar with the quality of Cushing's work in other fields most confidently expected, nor have they been disappointed. The period during which Osler lived, and in which he played so large a part, was one of tremendous scientific development; the

transition years of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were years in which a rapid succession of bacteriological, chemical, and physical discoveries were turning the old Art of Medicine into a New Science. Dr. Cushing has in no way swamped his subject's personality in consideration of such topics: rather has he filled in just enough where-with to form an admirable background against which we are shown a delightful portrait of the man whose sole request of his friends was that they should "write him down as one who loved his fellow-men."

Thus we see the very human boy pass from his wild life by the Canadian lakes to his first school, run by one John King, sometime Scholar of Trinity College, Dublin, where he became keen on cricket and practical jokes, and first showed a definite leaning towards natural history; we watch him grow gradually into the purposeful medical student, to fall under the influence of three men of exceptional mental endowment: one of them a religious, Father Johnson, who taught him to know and love Sir Thomas Browne—his *Comes Viae Vitaeque*: the other two being James Bovell and Palmer Howard, who "had learnt at first hand the great language of Graves and of Stokes." Howard it was, as Dean of the Medical Faculty at McGill, who later directed his steps to the post-graduate study of physiology, and gave him his first start on his professorial career as lecturer in the "Institutes of Medicine" at the early age of six and twenty. Nine years later the Dean was to lament the loss to the Faculty at Montreal of its "most potent ferment," on Osler's accepting the call to the Chair of Medicine at Philadelphia. But, through all his peripatetic life, *Wanderjahre* and *Meisterjahre* alike, Osler was never forgetful of what he owed to Johnson and Bovell and Howard, to the Montreal General, and to all his Canadian friends.

There follows then the greatest period of Osler's lifework, the years spent in America as Professor of Medicine, at Philadelphia (1884-1889), and Baltimore (1889-1905), the narration of which occupies the major portion of Vol. I. There remains on the mind of the reader not one, but a

series of impressions, of Osler's personality, with its all-embracing humanity: of his kindness to his patients, whom he treated, according to a student, "with equal parts of hope and nux vomica"; of his sociability; of his power of stimulation on his students to observe, record, and publish, the power, as Clifford Allbutt later said, possessed of only the few great teachers, of "inseminating other minds." Nor was his influence confined to the wards and laboratories: no man was more keenly alive to all the varied interests of citizenship, more aware of the valuable part which has always been played by the physician in public as well as in private history. Like Virchow, whom he so much admired, Osler became the champion of public health, in which department of medicine the America of his day was a generation behind Europe; in dealing with questions of typhoid, malaria, pneumonia, and tuberculosis, with voice and pen alike he was unceasing in his efforts to rouse the profession and the public from their apathy to a sense of their duties as citizens.

The opening of the John Hopkins Hospital in 1889 marked a new departure in medical education in the English-speaking world, and in this *Civitas Hippocratica*, surrounded with a closely-knit body of fellow-workers, he helped to fashion the system of clinical teaching within a University which has made of the Hopkins a *Schola Major* worthy of the great Commonwealth which had adopted him. From here appeared in '92 the first edition of his famous Textbook, whose dedication page has preserved for generations of students the names of his three Canadian teachers. Of the universal success of the Textbook it is unnecessary to write here; nine American editions, with separate French, German, and Spanish editions, speak for themselves. But of one collateral influence of the Textbook few English readers had any knowledge: the munificent contributions to the service of public health of two American millionaires, John D. Rockefeller and Henry Phipps, grew directly out of their interest in this book.

His American years were interrupted by many visits to Europe. All his life long he was an insatiable traveller,

the true ἀνήρ πολύτροπος, in pursuit of knowledge. During these years, too, was born the son, Revere, whom he so fondly loved, and whose untimely death on the battlefields of France proved almost the only cloud in his sunny life. Some of the pleasantest pages of these volumes are consumed with accounts of Osler's devotion to his own and others' children: his nature, "sloping towards the sunny side of life," in Lowell's happy phrase, went out continually towards them, and he was at his joyfullest and best when in their company.

In 1904 came the Oxford call, to succeed as Regius Burdon-Sanderson, whose pupil he had been thirty-four years before. At the Hopkins he had been working almost beyond his strength, and now, at fifty-five, he characterised this final stage in his peripatetic life as an "act of preservation"; the call had come, not to new labours, but to a life "private, unactive, calm, contemplative." How little private, and how actively unactive, this record of "The Open Arms" at Oxford tells us. Here, in the shelter of the Bodleian, within easy reach of Quaritch and Sotheby, the abandoned bibliophile could revel in incunabula and first editions to his heart's delight. From Oxford, too, his powers of potent fermentation worked their leaven far and wide, from the University Press to the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal Society of Medicine. He was ever on the wing, and in Cardiff as in Dublin, in Manchester as in Edinburgh, was manifested his "insatiable, but unobstrusive, appetite for helpfulness." The first ten years of this Oxford period were probably the happiest of his life: his boy had thriven, a son after his own heart: his collection of books had grown apace, and at the end of these years he could look back on three useful accomplishments, the establishment of the Association of British Physicians, the foundation of the Quarterly Journal of Medicine, and the formation of the Historical Section of the Royal Society of Medicine.

The terminal lustrum was clouded by the War. Ever a lover of peace, with a deep conviction of the hatefulness of strife and its disastrous effects, all the Cornish blood of his

ancestors rose to the challenge of the vandalism that had wrecked Louvain. Even in the darkest hours, his letters to friends in Canada and America never failed to carry a gloom-dispelling postscript, some message of cheer. His courage was of the constant, quiet kind, and, though racked with anxiety and foreboding over the fate of his son and nephews, he carried on unceasingly, unsparing of self. Dr. Cushing's powers as a biographer rise to their most artistic heights in the detailed picture of the quiet, peaceful University town given over to the alarms and excursions of war. And when to Osler, too, as to his countless friends, came the call for silent sacrifice, the single grain won through: "in quietness and confidence was his strength." He everlastingly kept on, with the firstlings of his heart, with the Bibliotheca, with his war-work in camp and hospital and committee, and yet could find time and heart to compose what many consider the high-water mark of his literary achievement, the Presidential Address to the Classical Association in 1919, on "The Old Humanities and the New Science," and to effect the final revision and disposition of his Textbook. But it was, in truth, a race with *Pallida Mors*.

His seventieth birthday called forth expressions of affection and esteem from the whole extent of the British and American Commonwealths such as had greeted no physician and few public men before. At the birthday dinner were presented to him two bulky memorial volumes of contributions from his old pupils and colleagues, which could not but recall to him the successive stages of his "vagrant career"—Toronto, Montreal, London, Berlin, and Vienna, as a student, Montreal, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Oxford, as a teacher.

But he returned home from that meeting a sick man, caught in the toils of his old enemy, broncho-pneumonia. A six-weeks' rest at Jersey almost pulled him together again; the last few years, however, had been a heavy strain: not alone the heart-breaking loss of Revere, but the thousand calls and anxieties begotten of the War, had undermined his strength. "The days of our age are three-

score years and ten; so soon passeth it away, and we are gone." The pneumonia was renewed on a motor-drive from Edinburgh, late in the autumn, and on the afternoon of New Year's Day, 1920, there was laid to rest by the banks of Isis the body of one of the most greatly beloved physicians of all time.

Dr. Cushing's modest estimate of these two volumes is that they are but *mémoires pour servir*, merely the outlines for the final portrait yet to be painted. With this mechanistic view of his accomplishment we most profoundly disagree; there is sufficient of the art, as distinct from the industry, of the biographer in this *Life* to satisfy even the exacting Mr. Guedalla. * Few who knew Osler intimately will quarrel with the portrait his gifted colleague has given us. He has preserved for us—very largely in Osler's own words—a memory and an inspiration of priceless value, and has produced a book of rare fascination, one to be marked down amongst the best biographies of our day.

Life of Sir William Osler. By Harvey Cushing. 2 Vols. Oxford University Press. 1925.

* ? Philip Guedalla, British writer & reviewer