

## LUNCHEON GLIMPSES OF SIR WILLIAM OSLER. DURING THE WAR.

by  
Edgar L. Gilcreest, M.D.  
University of California  
San Francisco.

It was my good fortune to have come in rather close contact with Sir William Osler in 1915 during the World War. He was consultant to one of the hospitals in South Devonshire, England, where I was working, and during his visits to this section, which would sometimes last a week, he would have luncheon with us every day after his ward rounds.

These luncheons were a delight as Dr. Osler's conversation was always sparkling and brilliant and full of humor. It became my custom to jot down in my diary much of what he said. In picking it up the other evening I found his remarks highly entertaining and it occurred to me that perhaps the readers of the Journal would find them equally so.

Dr. Osler returned after a month's absence. As he made his visit through the hospital he generated everywhere a spirit of warm friendship. He shook hands with all the doctors and nurses as he came to them, not overlooking the probationers. To those across the ward he waved a friendly greeting. One of the nurses asked him to let her take his photograph and he grasped the arms of two of the doctors saying:- "Well, but I must have the boys with me." A few moments afterwards the nurse, watching her opportunity, snapped him by himself. When he heard the click of the camera he looked up in surprise and exclaimed smiling:- "Oh! you thief."

As he met the secretary of the hospital, a very quiet and demure English woman, he asked her if she were being treated as well as she deserved. She blushed and replied that she thought she was. Whereupon Sir William replied:- "Well, if you are not, just let me know and I shall see that your treatment reaches that standard."

I showed him eight cases of gunshot wounds of the chest and he examined them carefully and dictated a note on each and then remarked to me:- "Turn them over to Dr. Rest and Father Time and with the assistance of the nurses and the culinary department they will soon come around."

He became very much interested in an aneurysmal varix of the popliteal which gave a pistol shot sound in both femoral arteries. When we went to lunch he soon had himself surrounded by every book in our library which contained any matter on aneurysms.

All of us were waiting in the drawing room for lunch. Dr. Osler was sitting on the corner of a table clicking his heels together with the buoyancy of a school boy, when the lunch bell sounded. But no one moved for a moment and then Dr. Osler quickly remarked to Lady Osler and Mrs Herbert Hoover:-

"Why, these boys get up at six o'clock (he must have surmised that we got up at eight o'clock!) and I know they are hungry. Let's go into lunch."

With us this day was a professor of sociology of a Western university and his wife, who were spending a year abroad studying social conditions. The Carnegie Fund for university professors was mentioned. Dr. Osler said; "It is a splendid thing and in many instances a life saver to the professors' wives. They (the wives) have a most trying profession," he added, "looking after us, for the best of us are a poor lot - simply treading on the fame of our predecessors & throwing dust in the students' eyes, but fortunately some of them find us out." One lady replied, "Why, Dr. Osler, I think you deserve all you receive. I have heard of Dr. Osler's book on medicine for so many years that I expected to meet an old man." Dr. Osler laughed and said; "Oh, that was my father. He was a fine old man!"

Dr. Osler then continued; "That reminds me of a time when two other doctors and I were sent on a committee down on the eastern shore of Maryland to investigate a matter. When we reached the small town where we were going, I was introduced to the doctor of the community, a splendid type of the Old School, and as he gave my hand a cordial shake, he asked hesitatingly, showing surprise that I did not have silver locks. 'Well, are you the Dr. Osler of Baltimore who has written that great book on medicine?' As quick as a flash I replied, 'Oh my no, that was my father!' 'Well I thought so,' he added, 'Now, you give the old man my regards and tell him that I certainly liked the way he presented the subject of infectious diseases, especially pneumonia and malaria.' 'I shall surely do that,' I said, 'and I know Father will be very gratified.' As we remained here several days we thought we would have to tell the old doctor the truth, but we didn't."

"One day on this same trip, we had just finished lunch and were in the office of the hotel, when some one rushed in and asked very excitedly if Dr. Osler were there and if he would come down to the shore, for a lady had fallen off the pier and she might be drowning. I immediately said that I did not know much about resuscitating drowned people, that was out of my line, but that one of the doctors with me was the Hopkins' specialist in this branch. This doctor was hurried to the scene and the fat woman who had ventured out too far on the pier and had slipped into the water was soon quite restored. The Baltimore papers gave an account of the incident the next morning, declaring that the woman's life was saved due to the prompt action of this doctor, a specialist in resuscitating drowning people, who happened to be near the scene. The fat woman has never forgotten the doctor's heroic deed and always sends him on her birthday a grateful letter accompanied by a personal photograph. By this time he surely has a sufficiently large collection to start a photographic gallery."

During th meal something was mentioned about the English not eating hot bread and Dr. Osler replied; "That is the reason most doctors in England are poor. Why, I used to make my living in Baltimore," he continued, "from the people who eat hot bread, just as the doctors in Boston make their living from people who eat pie. One time I had my secretary, a very intelligent

woman and a hot bread eater, of course, compile the histories of the cases which had come to my office for one year, and you would be surprised at the large per cent in which hot bread was the cause of their trouble." Then just to make a deeper impression on his hearers and with a twinkle in his eye, he said, "I believe it came to 68 1/2 %."

The professor of sociology, a very able but decidedly underdeveloped and undernourished, said he had been to see five specialists on account of stomach trouble. (I afterwards learned that all five of the specialists had told him that his trouble was neurasthenia) When the professor left Dr. Osler remarked; "That man is a very smart fellow but it was too bad that he couldn't have chosen his parents for he has too much brain for his body."

Coming out from lunch we sat around smoking and some one mentioned what the Rockefeller Relief Fund for the Belgians had accomplished. Dr. Osler remarked that it was rather peculiar how Mr. Rockefeller first became interested in Johns Hopkins. He said; "At dinner one evening in Baltimore Mr. Gilman, president of Johns Hopkins, and Mr. Gates, Mr. Rockefeller's right hand man, were sitting side by side and Mr. Gates remarked that not long ago he picked up, per chance, a book on medicine by a man named Osler and looking through it he became interested in it so purchased a copy and enjoyed intensely reading the section on infectious diseases. Not long afterwards he told Mr. Rockefeller how engrossed he had become in this book and that he wished to present him with a copy which he did. Soon afterwards, Mr. Rockefeller told Mr. Gates that he was surprised to know that medicine was such a wonderfully progressive science and to learn what good work this man Osler was doing in Baltimore. Mr. Gilman was naturally much interested in Mr. Gates' story and when he had finished he said; "Now Mr. Gates if you would sit down tomorrow and write Dr. Osler what you have told me, I am sure he would feel very gratified." Accordingly, in a few days I received a letter from Mr. Gates to the effect of the above. After reading it, I handed it to Mrs. Osler saying; "Please put this letter in the safe. There may come a time when it will prove of service."

Dr. Osler went on to say; "A few years later when the Baltimore fire occurred and subjected the Hopkins Medical School to such a loss, I asked Mrs. Osler to look up the letter from Rockefeller's man. The letter was readily found and I wrote immediately to Mr. Gates saying; 'You are doubtless aware of the awful fire which has visited Baltimore and of the loss which Hopkins has sustained. Several years ago you wrote me a very interesting letter and it just occurred to me that probably you could interest Mr. Rockefeller in considering our unfortunate position at this time.'

"A few days later I received a telegram saying, 'Our Mr. Murphy will be with you tomorrow.' And 'tomorrow' 'our Mr. Murphy' came and spent several days in making an accurate estimate of the Hopkins loss. In the evening we had him at the Maryland Club and showed him that we were a pretty good fellows !"

"After Mr. Murphy's departure several weeks expired, they seemed like months. We heard nothing and our hopes had waned considerably, when I received

a letter from John D. Jr. saying: 'My Father has carefully considered your losses which total \$430,000.67 and he wishes to know whether you would prefer to have a check or securities for the amount of \$500,000.' I immediately took my letter of good news around to the treasure and Mr. Rockefeller was informed that we would be pleased to receive a check for the \$500,000.

It was misting and cool one day. Several of us were standing around the fire-place waiting for the lunch bell to sound. Just then Dr. Osler came in bare headed and without an overcoat. Lady Osler looked at him and exclaimed in astonishment; "Why Sir William, what do you mean by running around here in the rain bare headed and without an overcoat?" Sir William, who was just getting over a severe cold, evidently could find no plausible explanation for his carelessness, <sup>and</sup> replied with a smile; "Well- ah- well, what's a little rain!" Mrs. Osler smilingly said; "Oh you are getting quite smart. I think it is time I was taking you back this afternoon to Oxford, although I believe you would really rather stay here." Dr. Osler acquiesced; "After I have been around those antiques at Oxford for a while I don't know what I should do now and then unless I came down here with the boys."