

Baltimore
CV5417/25.2

Osler, The Epigrammatic

Some Of The Celebrated Physician's Views Expressed During The Course
Of The Last Three Years To The Student Body of The
Johns Hopkins Medical School.

Dr. William Osler, who has left the Johns Hopkins University to become regius professor of medicine at Oxford, has for many years been a national—indeed an international—figure, not only in his chosen field, but as an epigrammatic philosopher as well. The recent furor created by his remarks concerning the comparative uselessness of men after the age of 40 demonstrated conclusively the position he holds in this country as well as in Britain, and in no better way can the many-sided brilliancy of the great physician be better illustrated than with excerpts from his clinical lectures and addresses given within the past three years. The News is able to give below a number of hitherto unprinted views of the Professor expressed at various times and upon various occasions, chiefly to the student body of the Johns Hopkins Medical School.

Dr. Osler is recognized as perhaps the greatest diagnostician now living, and in view of this fact, the following remark which he once made to his class is exceedingly interesting:

"Medicine is a science of uncertainty and an art of probability. Failure to make diagnoses causes medicine to be interesting. Of course one can make a certain diagnosis in every case, but it is done at the expense of one's conscience, and one goes deeper into the inferno with each diagnosis so made."

To young physicians he once said, in giving them advice as to the practice of their profession:

"In the first place, in the physician or surgeon no quality takes rank with imperturbability. It is the quality which is appreciated by the laity, though often misunderstood by them, and the physician who has the misfortune to be without it, who betrays indecision and worry, who shows that he is flustered and hurried in ordinary emergencies, loses rapidly the confidence of his patients. Cultivate then, gentlemen, such a judicious measure of obtuseness as will enable you to meet the exigencies of practise with firmness and courage, without at the same time hardening the human heart by which we live."

"Deal gently with this deliciously credulous old human nature in which we work, and restrain your indignation when you find your pet poison has triturates of the one-thousandth potentiality in its waistcoat pocket, or you discover accidentally a case of — (a well-known proprietary medicine) in the bedroom of your best patient. It must needs be that offenses of this kind come; expect them."

As to the researches of science, he once told his students:

"In seeking absolute truth we aim at the unattainable, and must be content with finding broken persons."

Here is a splendid bit of advice which applies equally well to physicians and to those in other walks of life:

"If the fight is for principle and justice, even when failure seems certain where so many have failed before, cling to your ideal, and like Childe Roland before the Dark Tower, set the slughorn to your lips, blow the challenge, and await the consequences."

Here is another bit taken from an address to his students:

"The past is always with us, never to be escaped; it alone is enduring, but amid the changes and chances which succeed one another so rapidly in this life, we are apt to live too much for the present and too much in the future."

As to the modern dream of medical Utopia, he once said:

"We can imagine in the future a social condition in which neither divinity nor law shall have a place—when all shall be friends, and each one a priest, when the meek shall possess the earth, but we cannot picture a time when Birth and Life and Death shall be separated from that 'grizzly troop' which we dread so much, and which is ever associated in our minds with 'physician and nurse.'"

Of scientists, Dr. Osler said on one occasion:

"There is no more potent antidote to the corroding influence of Mammon than the presence in a community of a body of men devoted to science, living for investigation, and caring nothing for the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. We forget that the measure of the value of a nation to the world is neither the bushel nor the barrel, but Mind, and that wheat and pork, though useful and

enables him to escape those cold gradations of decay. It is a painless release from the troubles of life. This patient had a 10-cent piece in his mouth several times to pay his ferrage. One foot was in Charon's boat half the time. Saline infusions saved him. What a disappointment it must have been to the old watchman! The only regret he can have is that he will be obliged to undergo this again subsequently."

Of pneumonia as a subject for the research of medical men he once said:

"Keep the mind open to pneumonia. Our grandchildren will be interested and as likely to have as many differences of opinion regarding treatment as we have."

Much covert fun is poked at modern appendicitis by the Doctor, and in his clinics he several times took sly shots at his brethren, the surgeons. Here are some of them:

"All colics mean appendicitis nowadays, and are admitted on the surgical side, much to the detriment of the patient as a rule, with the sacrifice of several weeks in bed, and the loss of his appendix when perhaps his pain was due to a lobster salad of the night before."

"Pain in the stomach nowadays is always appendicitis, and is recognized by the doctor's wife over the telephone."

Dr. Osler has a high regard for the use of the surgeon's knife, however, as is exemplified in the following quotations from clinics:

"Whenever there is pus there should be steel. Call on the Philistines for aid."

"Empyema needs a surgeon and three inches of cold steel instead of a fool of a physician."

The Doctor's preferences in the fair sex may be gathered from the following admonition to his students:

"Choose a freckled girl for a wife. They are invariably more amiable."

As to feminine mathematicians, the Doctor once said, in correcting a nurse for a chart she had brought him:

"The difference in weight on this chart only serves to illustrate the antipathy of the feminine mind to figures."

Concerning the drink evil, the Doctor frequently gave expression to interesting views. A few follow:

"Bacchus is a respecter of persons. What does a man north of the Tweed care for him? He sends no bills there. With a good backing of Presbyterianism, Bacchus has no chance. A Scotchman's flesh is proof against this god."

"Below the Mason and Dixon line one can take a glass of whisky before breakfast and four beers a day and live to a ripe old age without a complaint. One would not dare to do that north of the line."

"The bills of Bacchus are made up from 40 to 50. This is the busy season."

On a number of other medical subjects a few of the physician's pithy observations follow:

"Probability is the rule of life, especially under the skin. Never make a positive diagnosis."

"Let us all hope to die the death of gentlemen—with our boots on."

"Punctuality is the only necessary virtue. Have this, and all others will be added."

"In Alabama and Georgia all right kidneys are hitched up. It is not always an abdominal kidney, but a mental kidney that floats."

"Doctors always have anomalous diseases. Even their astigmatism is against the rule; they have all the odd things."

"The odor of bronchiectasis is potent; it bears the Standard Oil strain."

"We use only one side of our brain in doing small things—as buttoning the collar."

"The advantage of arterio-sclerosis—one of the silver linings to the arterio-sclerotic cloud—is the suddenness of exit, the death of the gentleman with the boots on."

"No farmer in this country goes through life without an attack of dyspepsia—some early, some late, some all the time."

"John as known to himself and John as known to his Maker are totally different from John as known to us."

"The striking distance of smallpox is several hundred yards."

"Female brunettes from the age of 12 to 20 are apt to be hypochondriacal."

"As much pity should be given to a woman's tears as to a goose going bare-foot."

"Jaundice is the disease your friends diagnose for you."

him in a clinic, would seem to contradict in a measure his famous age-limit views:

"The common-sense nerve fibre seldom becomes modulated before the age of 40. The earliest they are ever seen microscopically is at the age of 20. They usually begin to appear at 21."

In discussing a case of malaria at a clinic once, he said:

"The autumnal bill of fare for medical students in Baltimore is malaria and typhoid fever. This man comes from Sparrows Point, which makes the diagnosis certain."

Of the appearance of blood crescents in malaria, the Doctor said once:

"One swallow does not make a summer, but one crescent makes malaria. That clear luminous emblem of the Orient stares one in the face so that a mistake is impossible."

Concerning the treatment of typhoid fever in hospitals, Dr. Osler once said that "So long as we have human beings for house officers, ordinary mortals for medical students and modified angels for nurses we will have typhoid contagion from one patient to another in the records of our hospitals."

Of a child sufferer from typhoid, in remarking the well-known post-febrile frown, he once said:

"The bacilli of typhoid act on the frowning centre. Typhoid taciturnity, that sour look, is often seen. They (the patients) are full of old Adam. Sometimes this is due to wickedness, sometimes to the disease."

Another characteristic bit is found in the physician's discussion of thrombosed veins. These are his admonitions to the young doctor in dealing with such a case:

"Blame patient early, and keep on blaming him. Blame parents and ask them why they did not arrange to have better veins put in their offspring. Blame grandparents, and wonder why they did not have better tubing put into their children. The doctor gets all the blame for a case of thrombosis, especially if it is not cured."

In speaking of the clergy upon one occasion, the Doctor gave vent to a remark which perhaps will be decidedly opposed by the ministry. He said:

"I suppose as a body clergymen are better educated than any other, yet they are notorious supporters of all of the nostrums and humbuggery with which the daily and religious papers abound, and I find that the farther away they have wandered from the Council of Trent, the more apt they are to be steeped in thaumaturgic and Galenical superstition."

And this is the great Doctor's candid opinion of the press:

"The infernal daily newspaper and the worse than infernal monthly magazine have done more to create rural dissatisfaction than anything else in the world."

The following are extracts from the physician's addresses to nurses, and it is doubtful if any finer words have ever been addressed to those women than these:

"Printed in your remembrance, written as headlines on the tablets of your chateaines, I would have two maxims—'I will keep my mouth as it were with a bridle' and 'If thou hast heard a word, let it die with thee.' Taciturnity is a

creet silence, is a virtue little cultivated in these garrulous days when the chatter of the Bander-Log is everywhere about us, when, as some one has remarked, speech has taken the place of thought. To talk of disease is a sort of Arabian Nights' Entertainment, to which no discreet nurse will lend her talents."

"Marriage is the natural end of the trained nurse, who is a choice selection from the very best women of the community, who know the laws of health, and whose sympathy has been deepened by contact with the best and worst of men. She has not acquired immunity from that most ancient of all diseases, that malady of which the Rose of Sharon sang so plaintively, that sickness 'to be stayed not with flagons nor comforted with apples.'"

"In public the trained nurse has become one of the great blessings of humanity, taking a place beside the physician and the priest, and not inferior to either in her mission."

"Practically there should be for each of you a busy, useful and happy life; more you cannot expect; a greater blessing the world cannot bestow. Your passport shall be the blessing of Him whose footsteps you have trod, unto whose sick you have ministered, and for whose children you have cared."

"The religion of humanity is thin stuff for women whose souls ask for something more substantial upon which to feed. There is no higher mission in life than nursing God's poor. In so doing a woman may not reach the ideals of her soul, she may fall far short of the ideals of her head, but she will go far to satiate those longings of the heart from which no woman can escape. Romola the student helping her blind father."

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"There is no more potent antidote to the corroding influence of Mammon than the presence in a community of a body of men devoted to science, living for investigation, and caring nothing for the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. We forget that the measure of the value of a nation to the world is neither the bushel nor the barrel, but Mind, and that wheat and pork, though useful and necessary, are but dross in comparison with those intellectual products which alone are imperishable."

Some of Dr. Osler's words of wisdom to his students regarding their conduct after graduation are interesting. A few of them follow:

"A young physician should be careful what and how he writes. The crow of the young rooster before his spurs are on always jars and antagonizes. Keep your mouth shut, too, for a few years, particularly in discussions."

"Shun as most pernicious that frame of mind too often, I fear, seen in physicians, which assumes an air of superiority and limits as worthy of your communion only those with satisfactory collegiate or sartorial credentials."

"Your first duty is to medicine, which should have your best services and your loyal devotion. Not, too, in the perfunctory discharge of the daily routine, but in zealous endeavor to keep pace with and to aid in the progress of knowledge."

"Throw away in the first place all ambition beyond that of doing the day's work well."

"There are only two sorts of physicians—those who practise with their brains and those who practise with their tongues."

That the great physician has long held his much-assailed views upon the subject of the comparative uselessness of men after 40 is proved by something he once said during a clinical lecture. It is as follows:

"The men who are doing the work of the world are the men between the ages of 25 and 40."

Many inquiries will doubtless be raised by the following remark once made by Dr. Osler to his class:

"It cannot be denied that in dealings with the public just a little touch of humbug is immensely effective, but it is not necessary."

The physician's antipathy to the use of drugs is exemplified in many instances from remarks made at his clinics. Here are a few of them:

"Physicians are apt to become infected with the drug habit from patients. Drugs are no good. Some doctors imagine they carry the magic button in their medicine bag. Press it, and behold! the disease is cured in a day!"

"If many drugs are used for a disease, all are insufficient."

"Medicines! Humph! No! We have become so accustomed to the nickel-in-the-slot, press-the-button therapeutics that the laity expect a drug for everything. Her (a patient's) medicines should be complete separation from her friends, massage, electricity and release from drugs for three months."

"This big fellow (another patient) had simply melted away. He had cares and worries a great many. He came up from the South, moribund. Doses of optimism lavishly administered by the house physician cured him."

The Doctor's views of death as expressed to his class on one occasion in discussing a serious case of pneumonia are interesting. They follow:

"Pneumonia is the captain of the men of death. It is the old man's friend. It

pepsia—some early, some late, some all the time."

"John as known to himself and John as known to his Maker are totally different from John as known to us."

"The striking distance of smallpox is several hundred yards."

"Female brunettes from the age of 12 to 20 are apt to be hypochondriacal."

"As much pity should be given to a woman's tears as to a goose going bare-foot."

"Jaundice is the disease your friends diagnose for you."

"Here is a case of tuberculosis that has gained 14 pounds. He could not have done better in the Adirondacks. Baltimore is a good health resort."

"We are happy only when our temperature is above 98 degrees, which comes in the majority of us from 4 P. M. to 2 A. M."

"Tubercle bacilli ride into the lungs on black chargers—coal smoke and dust."

"Be suspicious of a man with white hair, a darkmoustache, and a florid complexion. He has served the gods."

"The liver is a perfectly useless organ. It is a most useful organ for the physician. Therefore, never tell the laity it is superfluous."

His habits are good—and he drinks city water!"

"There are no straight backs, no symmetrical faces, no even legs—we are a crooked and perverse generation."

Spoken of a deaf mute: "He is a happy man. We are no worse off with him than are the veterinarians."

"The skin has to be scoured inside and outside, and the internal secretion of the thyroid and supra-renal glands does the internal scouring. The secretion of the supra-renal gland dissolves the melanotic pigment that is constantly circulating in the skin, and this keeps the dominant races white."

"The cystocercus cellulose is gotten by man while feeding on salad at the Waldorf-Astoria or Delmonico's."

"It is the good fellows who become hypochondriacal, especially those born with the silver spoon in their mouths, and who have nothing to do. This patient's voice left him. It returned once, and he got no sympathy, so he said he would not bring it back again, and he didn't."

"Infantile memories are fallacious. I remember when at the age of six months I was taken to the pasture of my father's place—he was a North Canada missionary—to be given fresh milk along with the other calves, and a big blaze-faced bull calf butted me over backward into a bucket of milk."

"There are incurable diseases in medicine, incorrigible vices in divinity and indissoluble cases in law."

Of a small boy patient: "Here is a small boy who will not talk to anyone. He will make a wise man. Do not encourage him to talk."

The following is a characteristic speech of Dr. Osler's while addressing his class on the subject of anatomy:

"Anatomy may be likened to a harvest field. First come the reapers, who, entering upon untrodden ground, cut down a great store of corn from all sides of them. These are the early anatomists of modern Europe. Then come the gleaners, who gather up enough ears from the bare ridges to make a few loaves of bread. Such were the anatomists of the last century. Last of all come the geese, who still continue to pick up a few grains scattered here and there amid the stubble, and waddle home in the evening, poor things, cackling with joy because of their success. Gentlemen, we are the geese."

In the following epigram the Doctor once epitomized his idea of a great university:

"A great university has a dual function—to teach and to think."

The following remark, once made by

me the world cannot bestow. Your passport shall be the blessing of Him whose footsteps you have trod, unto whose sick you have ministered, and for whose children you have cared.

"The religion of humanity is thin stuff for women whose souls ask for something more substantial upon which to feed. There is no higher mission in life than nursing God's poor. In so doing a woman may not reach the ideals of her soul, she may fall far short of the ideals of her head, but she will go far to satiate those longings of the heart from which no woman can escape. Romola the student, helping her blind father, full of the pride of learning, we admire; Romola the devotee, carrying in her withered heart woman's heaviest disappointment, we pity; Romola the nurse, doing noble deeds amid the pestilence, rescuing those about to perish, we love."

In speaking to nurses about the appearance of sick men, he once said:

"Sickness dims the eye, pales the cheek, roughens the chin and makes a man a scarecrow, not fit to be seen by his wife, to say nothing of a strange woman in blue or white or gray."

And in concluding this list of quotations it does not seem inappropriate to give the following, taken from one of his public addresses some years ago, in which he said:

"Myself a peripatetic, I know what it is to bear the scars of partings from comrades and friends—scars which sometimes ache as the memories rise of the days which have flown and the old familiar faces which are gone."

A RUSSELL-STREET RIP,

Only Martin Nalta Didn't Sleep Quite Twenty Years.

Sun baths are a great health medicine, according to Martin Nalta, who is gray-haired, 52 years old, and leaves it to the ravens to feed him. From 10 o'clock yesterday morning until 2 o'clock in the afternoon he laid in the gutter of an alley near Russell street, with the hot rays of the noon-day sun beating on his face. Unmindful of the heat, he reposed there until Officer Scarborough of the Southern district roused him and took him to the station-house.

When the doors of a cell clanged shut on him he stretched himself out at full length and resumed his interrupted slumbers. In the usual course of events he should have been tried at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, but when that hour of tribulation arrived he was dead to the world, and had to be left over for this morning's batch.

"Will you have your case tried here?" said Justice Cox, this morning.

"Neln. I to Curtis Bay wants to go," he replied.

"I'll put you back in Jail," said Justice Cox.

"Do mits me vat you please. I libs much longer not. I am much sick," he answered.

"I guess you are, considering the amount you drank," said Justice Cox.

When told that he might go, Nalta turned to the Court and said:

"Der perlice mine shoes took. Makes them gib them back."

"Go on. You never had any shoes," said Lieutenant Collins.

When this shaft permeated his befuddled brain the old man ambled through the door, and quickly shook the station-house dust from his stocking feet.

To Build 14 Two-Story Dwellings.

Mr. Edward S. Hampson will erect 14 two-story dwellings on the east side of Wilkens avenue, between Frederick avenue and Baltimore street. The structures will be of brick, and will each have a frontage of 14 feet, with a depth of 42 feet. They will cost in the aggregate \$12,000.