

Scanned by Dr. Fisher

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SIR WILLIAM OSLER and the LIBRARY of the COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS
of PHILA.

The Honorary Librarian of the College
Francis R. Packard M.D.

Osler's love of books and his appreciation of their value so permeates his own writings that it is almost superfluous to quote any of his special allusions to them, but his golden sayings are so apt that I am sure I will be pardoned if I preface my remarks on his special relations to our Library by a brief reference to his views on the subject in general.

In his address at the opening of the new building of the Boston Medical Library in 1901 (^{I I} Footnote. Subsequently published under the title Books and Men, in *Aequanimitas* ^a) he said "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. To study the phenomena of disease without books is to sail on ^{an} uncharted sea, while to study books without patients is not to go to sea at all." This seems to me the keynote of all Osler's writing and teaching. In everything which he did he sought to make the members of his profession realize the importance of the cultivation of the intellectual side of their art, but always with due appreciation of the necessity for its practical application. In his presidential address before the Association of Medical Librarians in 1902 (^I Footnote. Published with the title "Some Aspects of American Medical Bibliography" in *Aequanimitas*) Osler gave at length his views as to the way in which a library of American medical books should be constituted and in reading it over ^{one} is forcibly impressed with the manner in which the literary element is made to subserve the practical.

Osler's gifts to our library were numerous and valuable, including one very valuable addition to our incunabula, the *Astronomici veteres*, published by Ald ^{us} at Venice in 1499. It was also one of the *Aldus*

group of Fellows of the College who subscribed together and purchased the first printed edition of the works of ^eCelsus, published at Florence in 1478, and presented it to the College. Many other rare books were donated by him personally to us, but the greatest service he rendered to the College was the vigilance with which he watched for anything which he thought might be of value to our Library and put us on the track of obtaining it. Our Librarian, Mr. C. P. Fisher has preserved a series of notes and letters written to him by Osler on the affairs of the Library. They are a remarkable monument to his unflinching interest in its welfare. In almost every letter he asks whether the College has some rare or interesting book of which he has found a copy in the course of his prowlings in old bookshops or frequenting of auction rooms. The books he writes of vary from incunabula to a collection of broadsides and pamphlets on the Siamese Twins, which he thinks the College should have because of the postmortem association of the Siamese Twins with the Mutter Museum. In another letter he writes that he is sending the Library a pamphlet by Priestly^e, adding "The College should collect the Priestly^e pamphlets not only for their intrinsic worth, but from his association with Pennsylvania." In the same letter he asks, evidently intending to send them to the College if the answer should be in the negative, whether the Library contains Glisson's *Tractatus de Ventriculo* 1678, and Bishop Berkeley's "Siris: a chain of philosophical reflections and enquiries concerning the Virtues of Tar Water," 1744; adding "It is one of his most famous philosophical works, and the starting point of the wide-spread use of tar water as a remedy throughout Europe!" In another he writes offering the Library a copy of Dodonaeus' *Medicinalium observationum*, published in 1521, directing attention to

its importance "as one of the first collections of post-mortems. Of course Dodonaeus is always interesting." Another time he writes on a postcard just the following lines, "Have you Sydenham's Observationes medicae, 1676? I picked up an extra copy. It is one of the rare original editions. Wm. O."

The last communication which Mr. Fisher received from him was written ~~from what was written~~ ^{what was to have} during his last illness on November 20, 1919. Our Librarian had just published in the Annals of Medical History a list of the incunabula in our Library. It is a short note written entirely in his own hand and I will transcribe it in full as a last instance of his thoughtful interest in our welfare: "So nice to see such a fine incunabula list. You have grown and there are some beauties. I run to about 150, and some are gems."

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 I have been laid up for six weeks and still in bed, a very protracted influenza, better now. Love to the Library Committee. Do you know that I only heard of Dr. Henry's death the other day. Dear man!" W.O.

To those "Sons of Belial" as he would have termed them who grudge the expenditure of money in the acquisition of incunabula or other ancient books for a medical library, and consider the space they occupy on the shelves, would be better employed if filled with the ephemeral publications of the day, we can only offer the advice that they read Osler's own writings in order to see of how much practical usefulness such venerable tomes are.

He not only had the bibliophile's passion for rare or beautiful books but he had the practical physician and teacher's appreciation of their proper use as tools. In his letters about books which he was

anxious our Library should possess it is noticeable that he always refers to some reason why the book would be useful to our Fellows. He does not advocate the purchase of a book, or send one to us as a gift without a brief statement of the reason why in his opinion the book would be useful. He had himself a very large and valuable collection of medical incunabula, and he knew them from cover to cover. His knowledge of the old medical authors was unsurpassed but his was no mere antiquarian's or collector's love. He familiarized himself with them in order to better approach the medical problems of the day. He said "By the historical method alone can many problems in medicine be approached profitably. For example, the student who dates his knowledge of tuberculosis from Koch may have a very correct, but he has a very incomplete, appreciation of the subject. Within a quarter of a century our libraries will have certain alcoves devoted to the historical consideration of the great diseases, which will give to the student that mental perspective which is so valuable an equipment in life".

To Osler's influence more than any other one cause is due the great awakening in interest in the study of medical history and the consequent increase in the breadth of view of the profession. Although Osler was preeminently successful as a practicing physician and teacher, nevertheless the scholarly bias of his mind was ever uppermost in his daily intercourse with his associates and in his writings. To his inspiration is largely due the greatness of our Library and the symmetry ^{which} it is proportioned to meet the needs of all who use it. Let us feel a just elation in our wonderfully complete files of current periodicals and in our acquisition of all the most recent publications, but we should also realize the value from every point of view in our

collection of old authors, and especially in our splendid group of medical incunabula, only excelled in this country by that of the Library of the Surgeon General, and let us render due and reverential homage to the wisdom and generosity of the great champion of our time to whose