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Dr. Wm. T. Sharpless,
West Chester, Pa.

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com file

Nov. 2, 1921.

Dr. Samuel McClintock Hamill,
1822 Spruce St.,
Phila., Penna.

Blockley

My dear Sam:

Your letter of October 19th is received. I have a great many recollections of Dr. Osler at Blockley all of which are pleasant. I send some of them to you and if you think any of them worth forwarding to Dr. Cushing you may. My first sight of Dr. Osler was in the autumn of 1885 when he delivered the introductory lecture to the freshmen class of the Medical School of the University of Pennsylvania. There was nothing very remarkable about the address except the personality of the man which impressed me very much. He seemed so simple, so straight forward, so kindly, so humorous. I remember some of the things that he said in that address, in fact I think it was one of Dr. Osler's good qualities as a lecturer that he could put things so that they made an impression on the minds of his hearers that remained.

We had an oral examination on graduation and Dr. Osler managed to begin the examination in such a familiar and conversational manner that the student did not realize for sometime that he was being examined and consequently felt entirely at his ease.

I was a medical interne at Blockley Hospital during his term of service though Dr. Caspar W. Sharples was Dr. Osler's immediate assistant. Whenever it was known that Dr. Osler was in the building there was a general migration from the residents quarters to the medical wards. Dr. Osler would greet us usually with some sort of pleasantry and taking one of us by the arm, stride off down the halls to his ward saying all kinds of bright and interesting things or humming to himself in his own peculiar way which did not have much regard for the canons of melody. He always treated the patients, no matter how poor or how dull or how uninteresting they might be with the greatest consideration. Instead of asking them a direct question he would generally make a statement followed by an interrogatory grunt, for instance, instead of asking "How are you today," he would say, "you are better today, eh-" I have noticed that a good many Canadians have this way of putting a leading question. He required his residents to take notes of these cases. I think then he had in his mind the idea of writing a textbook on medicine and was collecting the data for it. He was often very funny. I remember a woman who was highly neurasthenic, who tormented him with a description of her symptoms and with questions about herself. When he got out of the room he said in an undertone to the residents "that kind come not out but by prayer and fasting."

I do not seem to remember the amount of time that he put in at Blockley but he was certainly there a great deal. I have most distinct recollections of the Sundays when he came early in the morning and spent the whole day in making necropsies, which we

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saved for him, so far as it was possible to do it. I have known him to begin at eight in the morning and continue at this work until evening. He would perform these necropsies with the greatest of care. He would hunt for hours to find the small artery concerned in a pulmonary hemorrhage or the still smaller one whose rupture produced a hemiplegia. If he found something especially interesting he would send out the runner to get all the boys and show what a wonderful thing he had found and how interesting and instructive it was.

Once in the ward class there was a big colored man whom he demonstrated as showing all the classical symptoms of croupous pneumonia. The man came to autopsy later. He had no pneumonia but a chest full of fluid. Dr. Osler seemed delighted with his mistake and sent especially for all those in his ward classes, showed them what a mistake he had made, how it might have been avoided and how careful they should be not to repeat it. In thirty years of practice since that time whenever I have been called upon to decide between these two conditions I remember that case of Dr. Osler's. I am sure that it had the same effect upon the other members of the class that it had on me and was certainly the right sort of medical teaching. I saw him once overlook a case of small-pox, though he had quite recently been through the Montreal epidemic. These mistakes were counted unto him as merits by his pupils because he used them for our instruction.

Perhaps you remember the dinner given by the resident staff at Blockley after he had been elected to the chair at John Hopkins. He gave us a whole evening of his time. He told us most interesting things about his medical experiences when a young man and surprised us by his knowledge of local matters although he had been living in Philadelphia but a short time. He told us the famous Blockley cock-roach story in which complaints about the number and familiarity of these insects in the resident physicians dining room resulted in an awful row and nearly broke up the discipline of the place.

His knowledge of detail was always surprising. Once I fell in with him on the train as he was going to Elwyn during the time he was getting the material for his monograph on The Cerebral Palsies of Children. He knew I was a Quaker and he seemed to have the most accurate and intimate knowledge as to the beliefs, the practices and the history of the sect, although he certainly had never met with them until he came to Philadelphia. He told me of the quaker physicians of England, John Fothergill, Jonathan Hutchinson, and Joseph Lister, etc.

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He had a lot of interesting small talk. He told me he always read some poetry at sometime or other during the day generally in the evening. He almost never laughed though he had infinite capacity for making other people laugh. When he said some of his funniest things it was done with a droll little drop of the voice or a roll of the eye that was always more expressive than any boisterous evidence of amusement.

He loved to teach. He told me at Baltimore when women were about to be admitted to the medical school that he would rather teach women than not teach at all.

You remember, Sam, how we loved him. He was so interested in us, so anxious to help us, so patient with our dulness and ignorance that thirty years have not dimmed my recollection of these things. He inspired us all to do better work and to be better men.

Very truly yours,

William T. Sharpless.

WTS:MTW

