

From Arthur Thomson
re Duties of Regius.

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(script)

The Museum,
OXFORD.
Oct. 17. 1904.

My dear Osler,

I would have answered your kind letter sooner but I have been away and constantly on the move.

As to the duties of the Chair, they are not very arduous: so far as I am concerned, they are mainly connected with the arrangement of the different examinations and the conduct of the correspondence connected therewith, to put it briefly, the duties of the Regius, other than those concerned with teaching, are mainly the functions of a Dean. As Senior Examiner, he gives effect to the regulations of the Board of the Faculty of Medicine, and by the exercise of his judgement guides and to some extent controls the policy of the University so far as medical education is concerned. In this respect perhaps you will find most scope for your energy and experience.

I am afraid you will find Oxford a very conservative place and sorely hampered by a lack of funds. As you are doubtless aware you are required by statute to deliver a certain number of lectures. The selection of the subject on which you lecture practically rests with you. So far as clinical study goes, you have, as Regius, the right to a limited number of beds in the Radcliffe Infirmary, but unfortunately, although you may have some small (amount) of selected clinical material to deal with, you will be faced with the difficulty that the time at the disposal of the students here is limited and it seems to me that the only hope for developments in that direction would be the initiation of some system of post graduate study. I have little doubt but that you could attract graduates to special courses, the only difficulty I foresee is the sparseness of the clinical material, though no doubt, with care, cases of an illustrative kind could be got together.

I have always felt that there was an opportunity of extending the influence of the University Press as a medium of publication of Medical and Scientific literature and I feel sure that you could exercise your great influence in this direction with great benefit to the University and the country. From what I know of the Press, I feel sure that they would willingly co-operate in any such scheme in a generous spirit.

At present we are much troubled about pathology. There is an immediate risk that we may lose the valued services of Ritchie, the man who has done so much to render possible the teaching of pathology in Oxford. As you are doubtless aware, the stipend of the Readership is very small (only £300) and it has only been possible for Ritchie to do the work by engaging to some extent in private practice. He realises now that he has come to the parting of the ways and has decided to give up his entire time to pathology, but as it is necessary

that he must have a living wage, he has decided to become a candidate for the Professorship at Belfast (with between £6 and 700 a year). From all I can hear he is likely to get the appointment and what is Belfast's gain will be our loss.

Needless to say we are making very strenuous efforts to institute a Professorship, but here again we are faced with the old difficulty, lack of funds. I do hope, however, we can bring the University to a sense of its obligation and that something permanent may be done to put the teaching of pathology on a proper basis. I feel sure that a letter from you addressed to the Vice Chancellor would carry much weight and if you could see your way to exercise your influence in this direction I am sure we should all be grateful. It is for this reason that I deplore so much your absence at the present time.

If the condition of pathology be bad, that of pharmacology is even worse. Personally I have always felt that this was a departure in which Oxford should have led the way, we have been able to do nothing more than make a start and we have been indebted to Dr Smith Jerome, who has come to us for the past 8 or ten years for a summer term and delivered a course of lectures for the miserable pittance of £100 a year. What we want is a well equipped laboratory with a resident teacher who would carry on research at the same time that he gave the necessary instruction, but here again the matter resolves itself into a question of money and we have felt it better policy to perfect what we have already undertaken, than embark on fresh departures.

From what I have said you will recognise that there is abundant scope for your energies. Oxford finance is in such a condition that one can look forward to the future with little hope of success until some pressure (possibly in the shape of a Parliamentary Commission) is brought to bear on the Colleges and so cause them to disburse some of their (in my humble opinion) ill spent riches. If you could only bring over with you one of your American Millionaires the future of the Oxford Medical School would be assured.

I am sure by this time you must be heartily sick of Oxford in general and me in particular but as you asked me to write about these things I have done so at some length, because perhaps the fact that in this instance you have been forewarned may I trust be the means of preparing you for the work you have so generously undertaken.

I've had 19 years experience of Oxford now and I have learned to love the place, though slow to move the Oxford folk are eminently sympathetic and will I am certain do their utmost to further any schemes you may undertake.

Believe me,

Yours very truly

ARTHUR THOMSON.