

NOTES FROM BOOKSRectorial Contest, Edinburgh, 1908W. O.'s. Note

(script)

How is this for Mediaeval students
life. Read it to Welch and McJacobs and
Fulcher and then return. All well writing
hard at article. Love to Amy.

Edinburgh University.

The Union.

W.O.

25th. Oct. 1908.

Dear Professor Osler,

We all got a surprise yesterday when the poll was closed.

Practically everyone of us reckoned that it lay between you and Mr. Churchill, and that Mr. Wyndham was out of the running so we had captured so many conservative votes. . . .

However, every effort was made during the Thursday and Friday before the polling day by the Conservative forces outside as well as inside to slake some of the Conservative Votes; ~~and xxxxxxxx~~ to state some of the Conservative Votes, and I am sorry to state that some dastardly weapons were used to effect this purpose, while the polling was in progress I went round the polling booths and persuaded a lot of the waverers between you and Wyndham then as they might let in Churchill if Osler was leading towards the end of the polling hours.

Unfortunately Wyndham led by about 70 votes then and of course they cast for the top man of the two.

We are all deeply sorry that the campaign should have gone against us.

I was deputed by the Committee to write you about the whole affair and to express our regret that we had failed to return you at the top of the poll.

I am resuming the writing of this on Wednesday the 28th. as I felt that I had undertaken an awkward task. Your wire and letter have made this much easier for me and has cheered us all up. I feel convinced now that you have not underestimated the difficulties we have had to contend with.

The stone wall of political prejudice we had to face was practically invulnerable. * *

The law student for instance is a clerk in an office in the city, and is only seen in the precincts of the University when he comes up to and goes away from the single class which he takes each day. He has no University Association whatever, outside of the one mentioned,

and is under the personal influence of his employer who is usually a conservative. Needless to say therefore that out of nearly 200 votes cast in this faculty only 14 went to you.

A great number of the senior medicals (who were strong for you) were disfranchised owing to their having taken out all their classes extramurally and therefore no university class card to show to the polling officer along with their matriculation card.

We could not get motor cabs in Edinburgh to bring men up to the polling, so we had to fall back on the horse cab a wretched substitute. On the other hand a host of Conservatives and Liberals in the city put their private motors to the service of the Political candidates.

This is the dark side of the picture but there is a bright side too.

One of the traditions of a Rectorial here is that each party must struggle to raid and wreck if possible the Committee Rooms of their opponents. That our party would destroy this tradition, by not taking rooms and fighting like the political parties, was one of the first and most strongly pushed objections against us.

We did not hesitate to make capital out of this allegation.

Within about a week from the start of the Campaign we had entirely wrecked the Liberal Rooms and left them uninhabitable. We unscrewed all their doors and took them down to the Osler fort and made barricades of them so that when the Liberals came to attack us they had to batter down their own doors. We had no furniture when we started the campaign, but we had too much by the end of the war.

We had a lot of difficulty with the Conservative Rooms as the police would not allow any fighting about them owing to the value of the neighboring property. Our fighting men had got dubbed by our opponents as "the Physical Force Brigade" and the Conservatives angered our men by boasting amongst the students that we were powerless to defeat them. Every effort we had made had been stopped by the Police and not by the Conservatives. Our time came at last. On the Thursday night before the poll the Conservatives held a smoking concert and came down to attack us afterwards. We opened our outer gates to them and let them in off the street right up to our rooms. There was a lot of whooping and yelling, but very little fighting with them and I saw that the remembrance of former fights with the Oslerites was sapping their courage. I demanded of their leaders that they should give battle at once. They pled that they had no ammunition, I promptly offered them ammunition out of our own rooms. At this the Sergeant of Police laughed heartily. They then complained of having no battery room, and we offered them the

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great 20 foot spar which we had captured from the Liberals. However, they funk'd it and cleared away. This was annoying for our men and we determined to turn the tables if possible against them. Mr. Carr, a great fighter, and myself went out to spy out the enemy and to see what chance there was of a night attack. We kept 30 men with us in the Osler Garrison. Carr and I came back having formulated a plan of attack which was to be put into execution between two and three in the morning. Not a man asked for details of the proposed scheme until the hour arrived. Then we put every man up to what he had to do. At 2 o'clock 20 of us stripped for fighting left the Osler Garrison and crept through the streets with ladders axes and crowbars etc., towards the Conservative Rooms. We found that one of the shutters of their windows appeared to be unfastened. Our ladders were too short to reach it, but we crept on to an adjoining house roof and from there clambered along a narrow ornamental ledge which ran beneath their windows. Ten of the men remained in the street below with overcoats stretched out to catch any of our men if they fell. We managed to put 9 men into their rooms, before the night guard awoke. Terror and the fierceness of our onslaught overcame them and they capitulated. Just as our men were entering the window an Inspector arrived with about 30 or 40 policeman. He wanted to stop us, but I promised that if we made any disturbance or did anything which he disapproved of I would call off our men at once. As I had kept my word to him in a former fight about a similar matter, he consented to allow us to go on.

¶ During the next half hour, our men wrought their will. Every room was completely wrecked, chairs, tables, piano etc. etc. were reduced to matchwood. The whole of the place, inside and out was painted over with the legend "Vote for Osler". We then came away bearing some of the spoils of war which we deposited in the Osler Fort. Day and night since the campaign started, we have had a guard in our rooms. We did not have beds in case the men were overpowered by sleep as our opponents were. Our roof was our weak point and many a night have we sat out on the roofs all night watching by turns.

We have had several small attempts to catch us napping and three great organized attacks. In each of these our opponents were beaten off with many casualties. Luckily the Infirmary was close at hand as during each engagement a host of minor wounds had to be dressed. The motto of the Oslerites before a battle was "Get hurt". Fortunately none of us were detained long in bed, the severest case being 10 days. We gained great prestige by the fact that not a single man had entered the Oslerite Rooms without the consent of the

Oslerites, and that we had utterly wiped out both the opposing forces and swept their rooms.

Now I rather suspect that you will think all this physical fighting on your behalf rather puerile, and that you will also fail to see how it could beneficially affect your candidature... Well I can reply much from personal experience and observation that it did so. I know a great many students who at first had no definite interest in any of the candidates and then soon became proud to be enlisted in the victorious legions.

Personally I can never hope to be associated with a more virile and self sacrificing body of men and women than those who have borne the brunt of an unsuccessful battle in your behalf. They believed that you were their ideal Lord Rector and I was touched by the many ways they showed it. Classes, clothes, time, convenience were sacrificed and even health life and limb were endangered for "the cause". . .

As an instance of their readiness at all times I will relate an incident.

On Friday evening before the poll we assembled for a grand smoking concert in the Cathedral Hotel. Every man turned out who could get except the dozen or so of fighting men left in charge of the "garrison" (your Committee Rooms). We had not been seated half an hour when a scout came flying in and told me that the Conservatives were gathering all their forces to attack our rooms while we were away. I rose up and stated what was happening and asked for volunteers to defend the "Osler garrison". They were arrayed in "purple and fine linen" but that was to them a detail. They sprang to their feet, gave three ringing cheers for Professor Osler and within five minutes, over 200 men were speeding along the street towards Drummond St. Court. They arrived none too soon. Scarcely were men at their different posts when the Conservatives arrived armed with battering rams, axes, crowbars, hammers, ladders ochres etc. etc. In an hour and a half they sued for peace. By this time we had possession of all their axes crowbars, ladders etc. Practically the only thing they took away that night was exhibited on their persons, the remains of 96 dozen of rotten eggs which they had received from us during the preceding hour and half.

This letter I am afraid is getting long and tedious therefore I shall try and bring it to a close.

We are trying now to get the business side of things attended to. The balance is certainly going to be on the wrong side of the ledger, but we are going to try everything we can to cut down the

F. B. Contd.

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tradesmens accounts I expect that we will have an exact statement of how we stand in about a week. Making up the reckoning is very dry work, but we are proud to have wrought things more economically than our opponents. . .

All the "Oslerites" that I have met send you their very best wishes and hope to see and hear you at no distant date.

Pardon the length of this epistle and please accept the heart felt thanks of your Committee for all your kind and useful support during the conflict.

Yours respectfully.

Jas. Robertson.

? Chairman of Committee.

W.O.