

TELEPHONE No. 2631.  
[Gerrard Exchange.]

TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS—  
"AETIOLOGY, LONDON."

British Medical Journal,

429, STRAND,

LONDON, W.C.

September 20th, 1912.

Dear Sir William Osler,

I have been a long time answering your card about the origin of the skull and cross bones, but I have not forgotten the matter. I cannot find the origin of the emblem, but it would appear to be connected with that a legend ~~of~~ the cross on which Christ was crucified was set up on the site of the grave of Adam. This, I believe, is the meaning of the skull and cross bones so often seen in crucifixions by old masters like Guido. I cannot trace a pre-Christian use of the emblem, but then the pagans did not thrust the horrors of death before the eyes of people as good Christians have been in the habit of doing. I am afraid this will not help you, but it is all I can contribute at present. I have a <sup>German</sup> book in which several reproductions of graveyard scenes, dances of death, and so forth, of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are given, but I do not see the skull and cross bones in any of them. In one there is a skull and an hour glass.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

C. Louis Taylor

Sir William Osler, Bart.,

13, Norham Gardens,

Oxford.