

CU5417/124.118 1/5
Friday Dec. 14th 1917
Dinner to MacAlister at Dean Hotel
at 7.30 p.m.

The Library Association Record, 15 Feb. 1918.

Complimentary Dinner to the President of the Library Association.

The Council entertained the President at dinner at the Dean Hotel, Oxford Street, on the evening of Friday, 14th December. The company numbered thirty-six, and was a fully representative attendance of the Council with a few friends of the President.

Regrets for non-attendance and expressions of appreciation of Mr MacAlister's long connection with and great services to the Association were communicated from Sir Frederic G. Kenyon, Dr Francis T. Barrett, Messrs B. Anderton, R. Ashton, G. F. Barwick, W. H. Brittain, H. Farr, H. W. Fovargue, L. Inkster, J. W. Knapman, T. W. Lyster, C. Madeley, J. Minto, G. Preece, and C. W. Sutton.

Prof. Sir William Osler was in the chair, and in proposing the guest of the evening expressed his appreciation of the honour of presiding at a dinner to his old friend, in which there was a certain appropriateness as he knew, better than any one present, certain aspects of his active career.

There are two groups of men - the idealist, who looks before and after, the worrying, perturbing, spirit, never satisfied with existing conditions, who plays the Socratic gad-fly, stirring his fellow-men to higher efforts - and there is the plain practical man, whose business is with the day's work; in which class fortunately most of us come. You may recall the striking contrast between these two groups in Matthew Arnold's noble poem on his father - Rugby Chapel. There is also a third group, very small, the men of combined vision and action, and our guest MacAlister is one of these, he dreams dreams, but he also has the energy and "go" to put into effect. I often think this is a trait seen in its highest form in men from north of the Tweed. Buckle illustrates it in his splendid sketch of John Hunter in whom, he says, were united the deductive imagination of the north with the inductive empirical character of the south.

Our guest's dominant idea in life has been co-operation - combination. In America he would be called a "merger" a man who gets people together. In the cold cheerless smoking-room of an hotel or club there may be a grate with coals, and they are afire, but the lumps are scattered and there is neither light nor heat. In comes a man with a poker, breaks the lumps, gets them together, rakes out the ashes, arranges the draught, and in a few minutes there is the glow of heat from a proper fire. Well, MacAlister has been the man with a poker. As secretary from 1887-1898 he was active in getting the librarians of the country together, and in securing a charter for the Association, and I need not tell you of his devoted interest in its welfare. The published proceedings of the recent meeting, over which he presided so ably, show a live, vigorous Society

deeply anxious to promote the welfare of the public. In all aspects of library work he has been the trusted counsellor, whose advice has been sought far and near.

Of one aspect of his many activities I have had full opportunities of judging. MacAlister began life as a medical student, but after three years, ill-health compelled him to abandon a career for which he was peculiarly well fitted. Shortly after coming to London he became Secretary and Librarian to the old Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society, which had its rooms in Berners Street. A dozen or more Medical Societies met in the same rooms. The fusion of these various bodies into a Royal Society of Medicine has been very largely his work. Certainly without his vision and energy it could not have been accomplished, and the magnificent building at 1 Wimpole Street is the result of his work with the poker. The medical profession owes him a deep debt for the unselfish and untiring way in which he carried through this difficult job. In scores of outside enterprises, particularly in the Congresses and Conferences of the past twenty-five years, he has very often been the driving force, the dynamo in the cellar, which has made the machine work.

Though there are few men to whom one could apply more justly Sir Thomas Browne's word eusarcoid, we all know that our friend has not enjoyed the luxury of superfluous health, so that, if ever, this is an occasion when we may wish that the remainder of his life may be eusplanchnic; indeed it will be fitting to end my toast with a verse (modified a bit) of the Wishing Song of Dr Walter Pope:-

With a courage undaunted may you face your last day,
And when you are dead may the better sort say,
In the morning when sober, in the evening when mellow,
He's gone, and h'aint left behind him his fellow;
For he governed his passions with an absolute sway,
And grew wiser and better as his strength wore away
Without gout or stone, by a gentle decay.

The President, received with great ovation, replied as follows:-

Sir WM. OSLER, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, - Mark Twain told me that he first met Grant unexpectedly on a balcony, and when they were introduced neither, for several embarrassed minutes, could think of anything appropriate to say. Mark had a great reverence for Grant, whom he thought the greatest of living men, and was dumb. At last he burst out - "I am embarrassed, General!" "So am I!" said Grant - a hearty laugh broke the ice, and they got along.

So, Sir William, holding you as I do as the pride and ornament of the profession I serve, hearing you say all these kind things

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1917.
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of me leaves me embarrassed. I wouldn't have believed it all if you hadn't said it; but I know now as you say it, it is all true. I am abashed, but proud. But in my stumbling fashion I want to tell you how deeply I appreciate your kindness, and how grateful I am for this expression (one of many) of your friendship. No one knows so well as I do how completely I have failed to do the big things for the Association, and for librarianship, which from time to time I have planned, and bungled; but you have done what is very rare among men (and nearly as rare among women), you have ignored the poor results, and said kind things about my attempts. You have brought a better colour to my cheeks to-night than all the other members of your great profession have effected in their kindly ministrations, by your too generous references to my work for the medical profession of which I am proud to be the servant. Thirty years ago I dreamed a dream, but it took twenty years to realise it as it stands now in Wimpole Street, and I had almost despaired of success, and was very tired, when you came and put fresh heart in me, encouraged me to keep on trying, and inspired by your cheery optimism I did try again, and won out. So it is a simple fact that but for you that piece of work would have ended in failure.

If I had the eloquence of Mr Herbert Jones I would try to express the warm feeling of gratitude and pleasure I enjoy at seeing to-night so many old friends gathered here to say kind things to one of the passing veterans, who with them has tried to do something for librarianship; but you must take it on trust. I was going to refer to my brother veteran, Tedder, but a glance at him has upset the flow of my thought, for to refer to such a sprightly youth as a veteran would be sheer nonsense.

But before I sit down I want to complain that in enumerating the things I have done for the L.A. no mention has been made of the most valuable of all my services. I gave you Tedder. I knew that would make you sit up! You will scarcely believe there was a time - before some of you were born - when the Association was not well managed. There was no Kettle then to keep the Council up to the mark, and things got so bad there was a secret meeting (in the North of course) to arrange for its winding up. Tedder, who hated wasting time, despaired of reform and decided to withdraw. Ernest Thomas came and told me the bad news, and within an hour I was at the Athenæum and unfolded a plan, which I thought would work. Tedder was not optimistic, but finally agreed to wait and see. The plan did work, the necessary reform was carried through, and Tedder stayed, and I can't keep you here all night to tell you all he has done for you during the last thirty years, besides you know it as well as I do.

I want especially to thank whoever conceived the happy and generous thought of securing Sir William Osler's presence to-night, for it is the simple truth that I shall value that all my life as the highest honour and highest reward I could receive for whatever I may have been able to do for the dear old Library Association.

Mayfair 5743

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55, Upper Brook Street, W.1.

28. VII. 20

Dear Cushing,

Here is the reference to
Osler's description of
MacAlister as "the man
who fakes the fore."

Will you return it to
A. L. Clarke Esq.
1 Wimpole St.
W.

With best wishes

Yours ever

J. D. Robertson

Royal Society of Medicine

1, WIMPOLE STREET,

LONDON, W.

From the SECRETARY

27th July, 1920

to Sir Humphry Rolleston, K.C.B., M.D.,
55, Upper Brook Street, W.1

N.B.—It will save trouble if answers
or annotations are written in
margin, and this sheet returned.

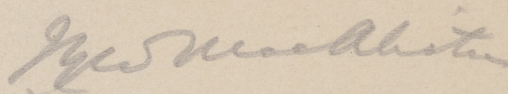
Dear Mr. President,

I found I had no copy, but
Mr. Clarke has kindly loaned me his
copy of the L.A.Record, and on p.49
you will see the original from which
you quoted.

You might bring it with you
when you are done with it, as Mr. Clarke
treasures it.

In case you want to send it
to Cushing, I enclose wrapper.

Yours very sincerely,



JOHN Y.W.MAC ALISTER