SIR WILLIAM OSLER, M.D.
(1849-1919)

HIS LIFE THROUGH SOME IMAGES & QUOTATIONS

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[Signature]
SIR WILLIAM OSLER (1849-1919)

“The practice of medicine is an art, based on science”. (William Osler)

Carte de visite, showing a portrait of William Osler, from Osler's student days in Montreal. Osler was a student at McGill Medical School from 1870-1872; after this time he spent two years studying abroad. The back of this portrait shows an inscription in Osler's handwriting; it was presented by Osler to his sister Ellen Mary (also Mrs. A. E. Williamson), or "Nellie" as she was known to the family. (Publisher: Osler Library of the History of Medicine, McGill University).
“Medicine is a science of uncertainty and an art of probability”. (William Osler)

A carte de visite showing a portrait of William Osler in February of 1871, as a student at McGill Medical School. Osler was a student at McGill from 1870 to 1872. [Date 1871-02-18]. (Publisher: Osler Library of the History of Medicine, McGill University).
"The higher the standard of education in a profession, the less marked will be the charlatanism." (William Osler)

A portrait of William Osler taken in 1877. Osler accepted a post as lecturer at McGill Medical School in 1874, was promoted to professor the next year, and remained at McGill until 1884, when he moved on to the University of Pennsylvania. Osler was also a graduate of McGill Medical School. (Publisher: Osler Library of the History of Medicine, McGill University).
“It is much more important to know what sort of a patient has a disease than what sort of a disease a patient has”. (William Osler)

William Osler's carte de visite, dated October, 1881. A carte de visite consisted of a portrait photograph mounted on stiff cardboard; these were then distributed to friends and acquaintances. At the time this photograph was taken Osler was working as a professor at the McGill Medical School and as a pathologist at Montreal General Hospital. (Publisher: Osler Library of the History of Medicine, McGill University).
“The good physician treats the disease; the great physician treats the patient who has the disease”. (William Osler)

Portrait of William Osler in about 1884, around the time of his move from Montreal, where he was a professor at McGill Medical School and a pathologist at Montreal General Hospital, to Philadelphia, where he became Chair of Clinical Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania and a pathologist at Philadelphia General Hospital (also called Blockley Hospital). (Publisher: Osler Library of the History of Medicine, McGill University).
“We can only instill principles, put the student in the right path, give him method, teach him how to study, and early to discern between essentials and non-essentials.”

(William Osler)
"To have a group of cloistered clinicians away completely from the broad current of professional life would be bad for teacher and worse for student. The primary work of a professor of medicine in a medical school is in the wards, teaching his pupils how to deal with patients and their diseases." (William Osler)
"Medicine is learned by the bedside and not in the classroom. Let not your conceptions of disease come from words heard in the lecture room or read from the book. See, and then reason and compare and control. But see first." (William Osler)

William Osler seated at a patient's bedside at Johns Hopkins Hospital, circa 1903. Osler was physician-in-chief at Johns Hopkins from 1889 to 1905 and was known as a great innovator in medical education, and insisted on teaching in the hospital wards. Date: ca. 1903.
"If you listen carefully to the patient they will tell you the diagnosis”. (William Osler)

“Listening”: William Osler by a patient's bedside, holding a stethoscope. This photograph was likely taken at Johns Hopkins Hospital while Osler was teaching there. Baltimore Period (1889-1905).
“Variability is the law of life, and as no two faces are the same, so no two bodies are alike, and no two individuals react alike and behave alike under the abnormal conditions which we know as disease”. (William Osler)

“Inspection”: William Osler treating a patient, probably in Johns Hopkins Hospital; Osler is seated next to the patient's bed. The names of the other individuals are unknown. Baltimore Period (1889-1905).
"When schemes are laid in advance, it is surprising how often the circumstances will fit in with them." (William Osler)
"Care more for the individual patient than for the special features of the disease. . . . Put yourself in his place . . . The kindly word, the cheerful greeting, the sympathetic look -- these the patient understands." (William Osler)

“Auscultation”: William Osler treating a patient, probably in Johns Hopkins Hospital; Osler is seated next to the patient's bed. The names of the other individuals are unknown. Baltimore Period (1889-1905).
"There are only two sorts of doctors: those who practice with their brains, and those who practice with their tongues." (William Osler)

"To confess ignorance is often wiser than to beat about the bush with a hypothetical diagnosis." (William Osler)
“Observe, record, tabulate, communicate. Use your five senses. Learn to see, learn to hear, learn to feel, learn to smell, and know that by practice alone you can become expert.”

(William Osler)
“As is our pathology so is our practice...what the pathologist thinks today, the physician does tomorrow.” (William Osler)

Sir William Osler (1849-1919) at the autopsy in the Blockley Mortuary, Philadelphia General Hospital (1886 or 1889). Osler was appointed an official pathologist at Blockley Hospital soon after his arrival in Philadelphia; he was Chair of Clinical Medicine at the University of Philadelphia from 1884-1889. Osler is credited with coining the term 'One Medicine, one Pathology.' Osler spent 3 months with Virchow, and autopsied his own patients. Note the lack of gloves, mask and gown. (Osler Library Photography Collection, Osler Library of the History of Medicine, McGill University, Montreal, QC, Canada). Between 1876 and 1889, he performed nearly 1000 autopsies in Montreal, Quebec, and Philadelphia, Pa. Many authors concluded that Osler stopped performing autopsies once he moved to Baltimore, Md, because the autopsy service was organized under William Welch, the professor of pathology. However, this assertion has been contradicted by a recent biography of Dr Osler. To reexamine this issue, the autopsy records of The Johns Hopkins Hospital and relevant publications were examined. The evidence suggests that Dr Osler was an enthusiastic, and sometimes engaged, observer of Hopkins autopsies but that he did not function as an autopsy prosector [Brendan P. Lucey, Grover M. Hutchins (2008) Did Sir William Osler Perform an Autopsy at The Johns Hopkins Hospital? Archives of Pathology & Laboratory Medicine: February 2008, Vol. 132, No. 2, pp. 261-264].
“The best preparation for tomorrow is to do today's work superbly well”.
(William Osler)

William Osler performing an autopsy at the Blockley Mortuary in Philadelphia. Osler was appointed an official pathologist at Blockley Hospital soon after his arrival in Philadelphia; he was Chair of Clinical Medicine at the University of Philadelphia from 1884-1889. Date: 1886 or 1889. Location: Philadelphia General Hospital.
“There is no more difficult art to acquire than the art of observation, and for some men it is quite as difficult to record an observation in brief and plain language.”

(William Osler)

“The value of experience is not in seeing much, but in seeing wisely.” (William Osler)

"The successful teacher is no longer on a height, pumping knowledge at high pressure into passive receptacles." (William Osler)

William Osler (1849-1919) conducting a demonstration in Pathology in the "Green Room" in Philadelphia General Hospital. Osler is shown seated, wearing a bowler hat. This photograph is reproduced in John Welsh Croskey's "History of Blockley: A History of the Philadelphia General Hospital from its Inception, 1731-1928." Croskey gives the date as 1887. Osler was a member of the medical staff at Philadelphia Hospital (also known as Blockley) from 1885 to 1889 and was Chair of Clinical Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania from 1884 to 1889.
"In science the credit goes to the man who convinces the world, not to the man to whom the idea first occurs." (William Osler)

“The very first step towards success in any occupation is to become interested in it”. (William Osler)
"The extraordinary development of modern science may be her undoing. Specialism, now a necessity, has fragmented the specialities themselves in a way that makes the outlook hazardous. The workers lose all sense of proportion in a maze of minutiae".

(William Osler)

"Throw away all ambition beyond that of doing the day's work well. The travelers on the road to success live in the present, heedless of taking thought for the morrow. Live neither in the past nor in the future, but let each day's work absorb your entire energies, and satisfy your wildest ambition." (William Osler)
A gathering of the Oslers' friends and family. Some of the individuals have not been identified. Grace Revere Osler, her mother Mrs. Revere, her brother Will Revere, and her son Revere on his father William Osler's knee are all present in the photo (the identity of the woman presumed to be Mrs. Revere is not certain). Notes: From left to right: Grace Revere Osler, her mother Mrs. Revere (uncertain), two unidentified individuals, Will Revere, Revere Osler, William Osler, and two unidentified individuals. Oxford, England, June 1905. (Publisher: Osler Library of the History of Medicine, McGill University).
The Osler family -- William, Grace Revere, and Edward Revere -- at 7 Norham Gardens, Oxford. The Oslers moved to Oxford in May of 1905, about a month before this picture was taken, after William Osler had accepted the position of Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford University. The family lived at 7 Norham Gardens until 1907, when they moved to a new home at 13 Norham Gardens. The photograph was taken by Dr. Colin Kerr Russel, who became a professor of neurology at McGill University, and had completed post-graduate studies at Johns Hopkins University with Osler.
The Osler family, William, Grace and Revere, in about 1910 on the terrace of their home at 13 Norham Gardens. The Oslers moved to Oxford in 1905 and to 13 Norham Gardens in 1907; in 1910 Revere would have been about 14 years old. (Publisher: Osler Library of the History of Medicine, McGill University).
Grace Revere Osler and her son, Revere, on the terrace of 13 Norham Gardens, their Oxford home. This picture was taken circa 1910, when the family had been living in Oxford for five years and at 13 Norham Gardens for three years. Revere is about 14 years old in this photo.
WILLIAM OSLER`S HOME IN OXFORD, ENGLAND

The house and garden at 13 Norham Gardens, the Oslers' home in Oxford from 1907 until their deaths. William and Grace Revere Osler entertained so many guests so frequently here that the house began to be known as "The Open Arms" among friends. (Publisher: Osler Library of the History of Medicine, McGill University).
William and Grace Revere Osler, and their son Revere Osler, with friends on the steps of their Oxford home at 13 Norham Gardens. This photograph was taken in 1907, the year they moved into this house. Included in the group are Campbell Palmer Howard, his sister Marjorie Howard, and her future husband Thomas Futcher, and Grace Osler's lifelong friend Sarah Woolley. The Howard siblings were the children of Osler's McGill University mentor, Robert Palmer Howard. The Oslers were well-known among friends and family as generous hosts; their home became known as "The Open Arms" to those close to them.

Notes: Standing, from left to right: Nicola (?) Smith, Campbell Palmer Howard, and an unidentified man. Sitting, from left to right: Marjorie Howard, William Osler, Thomas Futcher, Revere Osler, Sarah H. Woolley, Amy Gwyn (hidden behind Grace Revere Osler; shoulders visible), and Grace Revere Osler. (Publisher: Osler Library of the History of Medicine, McGill University).
William Osler and his son, Edward Revere Osler, in the nursery of the family home at 1 West Franklin Street, Baltimore (Md); "Revere", as the boy was known, would have been about two years old when the photo was taken. William Osler was fond of children and was known for his ability to put them at ease. Osler himself captioned a copy of this photo, "And on his shoulders, not a lamb, a Kid." Date: ca. 1897. William Osler was not married until he was 43 years old and Edward Revere was his only son.
Young Revere Osler, aged about 10, in front of a veranda in an unidentified location. Revere was nine years old, going on ten, when the Oslers moved from Baltimore to Oxford. William Osler had left Johns Hopkins Hospital to take the position of Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford University. During his childhood in Oxford, Revere was a student at the Dragon School. Date: ca 1906.
William Osler giving his son Revere a piggy-back ride on the beach at Bude, a small town on the north coast of Cornwall. The Oslers took a cottage there in August and September, 1907. At this time the Oslers had lived in England about two years, and had recently moved from 7 Norham Gardens to 13 Norham Gardens, Oxford, which would remain their home for the rest of their lives. (Publisher: Osler Library of the History of Medicine, McGill University).
Revere Osler and Sir William Osler (1849-1919) at a cottage in Llanddulas, Wales. The Oslers spent a peaceful month here in the summer of 1911. Sir William had just been made a baronet two months previously. (Publisher: Osler Library of the History of Medicine, McGill University).
William Osler and his son Revere standing with arms linked on the terrace of what is probably 13 Norham Gardens, their Oxford home. This photo is undated. William Osler became Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford University in 1905.
Edward Revere Osler, William and Grace Osler's only child, aged about 14 (?) on the steps of his family home at 13 Norham Gardens, Oxford. He is wearing what is probably a school uniform. Revere was a student at Winchester College from 1910 until his matriculation in 1914.
Revere Osler with a freshly-caught fish, probably somewhere in Oxfordshire, England. Revere had been an avid fisherman since childhood. This photo was taken during the First World War, while Revere was home on ten days' leave from the Royal Field Artillery. Notes: Revere May 1917. On leave & happy.
(transcribed from front of photo)
Sir William Osler and his son Revere, both in uniform, on the terrace of 13 Norham Gardens, their home in Oxford. This photo was taken during World War One, in about 1916, the year that Revere, aged 20, joined the field artillery of the British Army. He died from wounds sustained in battle in August of 1917. Sir William served as head physician at the Canadian Red Cross hospital at Cliveden for the duration of the war.
Revere Osler in uniform during the First World War. In 1914, Revere joined the Oxford University Officers Training Corps. At the end of that year he turned 19 and was therefore of age to serve; beginning in 1915 he served in the McGill Medical Unit, switching to the Royal Field Artillery in 1916.
Revere Osler in uniform, smiling and facing the garden on the terrace of 13 Norham Gardens, the Oslers' Oxford home. During the First World War the minimum age for military service was nineteen years; in the first year of the war, too young to serve, Revere belonged to the Oxford University Officers' Training Corps. He turned 19 on December 28, 1914, and joined the McGill Medical Unit in 1915. In 1916, expressing a desire to see combat, Revere joined the Royal Field Artillery. He died in Ypres, Belgium, on August 30, 1917, of wounds sustained in an attack, and was buried in Flanders, Belgium. The Revere’s death was a blow that William Osler never recovered emotionally completely from.
Revere Osler's grave in Dozinghem Cemetery near Flanders, Belgium. This photo shows the original wooden marker, which was later replaced by a rectangular granite headstone. Revere, the only son of William and Grace Revere Osler, was fighting for the Royal Field Artillery when he was seriously wounded in a German attack near Ypres, Belgium. He died of his wounds on August 30, 1917 and was buried in Flanders the day after. The ceremony was described in the journal of Harvey Cushing, who was present during Revere's final hours and at his funeral.
Dozinghem Cemetery, near Flanders, Belgium, where Revere Osler (1895-1917) is buried. Revere, the only son of William and Grace Revere Osler, was fighting for the Royal Field Artillery when he was wounded in a German attack near Ypres, Belgium. He died of his wounds on August 30, 1917 and was buried in Flanders immediately afterwards. Harvey Cushing, a friend of the Oslers and Sir William Osler's first biographer, had been serving nearby in a medical unit and was present during Revere's final hours and at his funeral.
Revere Osler's grave at Dozinghem Cemetery in Flanders, Belgium. The original marker was a wooden cross. Revere, the only son of William and Grace Revere Osler, was fighting for the Royal Field Artillery when he was wounded in a German attack near Ypres, Belgium. He died of his wounds on August 30, 1917 and was buried in Flanders immediately afterwards. Harvey Cushing, a friend of the Oslers and Sir William Osler's first biographer, had been serving nearby in a medical unit. When Cushing received word that Revere Osler was seriously wounded, he rushed over to the hospital and observed the midnight surgery on Revere for wounds of the chest, abdomen, and thigh, and was present during Revere's last hours and at his funeral.
“It is astonishing how little reading a doctor can practice medicine, but it is not astonishing how badly he may do it”. (William Osler)

"For the general practitioner a well-used library is one of the few correctives of the premature senility which is so apt to take him."(William Osler)

The Sir William Osler's library at 13 Norham Gardens, the Oslers' home in Oxford from 1907 to their deaths. The Oslers entertained so often here, and housed visitors so frequently, that the house became known among friends as "The Open Arms". This picture was taken by John Farquhar Fulton, the doctor and bibliophile, before Sir William Osler's book collection was removed to McGill University. Osler bequeathed his library to McGill on his death in 1919; the Osler Library opened there in 1929. Note the fireplace mantle with the portraits of Linacre, Harvey and Syndeham above. (Publisher: Osler Library of the History of Medicine, McGill University).
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"Now the way of life that I preach is a habit to be acquired gradually by long and steady repetition. It is the practice of living for the day only, and for the day's work."

(William Osler)
"We are here to add what we can to life, not to get what we can from life." (William Olser)

William Osler (1849-1919) with portraits of Thomas Linacre, William Harvey and Thomas Sydenham in the library of 13 Norham Gardens, his Oxford home. Linacre, Harvey and Sydenham were all influential English physicians. Date, 1907. (Publisher: Osler Library of the History of Medicine, McGill University).
"No human being is constituted to know the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth; and even the best of men must be content with fragments, with partial glimpses, never the full fruition". (William Osler)

The Sir William Osler's library at 13 Norham Gardens, the Oslers' home in Oxford from 1907 to their deaths. The Oslers entertained so often here, and housed visitors so frequently, that the house became known among friends as "The Open Arms". This picture was taken by John Farquhar Fulton, the doctor and bibliophile, before Sir William Osler's book collection was removed to McGill University. Osler bequeathed his library to McGill on his death in 1919; the Osler Library opened there in 1929. (Publisher: Osler Library of the History of Medicine, McGill University).
"The search for static security - in the law and elsewhere - is misguided. The fact is security can only be achieved through constant change, adapting old ideas that have outlived their usefulness to current facts." (William Osler)
"A library represents the mind of its collector, his fancies and foibles, his strength and weakness, his prejudices and preferences. Particularly is this the case if, to the character of a collector, he adds -- or tries to add -- the qualities of a student who wishes to know the books and the lives of the men who wrote them. The friendships of his life, the phases of his growth, the vagaries of his mind, all are represented." (William Osler)
“It is much simpler to buy books than to read them, and easier to read them then absorb their contents”. (William Osler)

"One of the first duties of the physician is to educate the masses not to take medicine."
(William Osler)

"The philosophies of one age have become the absurdities of the next, and the foolishness of yesterday has become the wisdom of tomorrow." (William Osler)

The Sir William Osler Library. The northeast corner of the sitting room at 13 Norham Gardens, the Oslers' home in Oxford from 1907 to their deaths. Osler bequeathed his library to McGill University on his death in 1919; the Osler Library opened there in 1929.
"The great minds, the great works transcend all limitations of time, of language, and of race, and the scholar can never feel initiated into the company of the elect until he can approach all of life's problems from the cosmopolitan standpoint." (William Osler)
"There are, in truth, no specialties in medicine, since to know fully many of the most important diseases a man must be familiar with their manifestations in many organs."

(William Osler)
"The higher education so much needed today is not given in the school, is not to be bought in the market place, but it has to be wrought out in each one of us for himself; it is the silent influence of character on character." (William Osler)
"Perhaps no sin so easily besets us as a sense of self-satisfied superiority to others."

(William Osler)
"The practice of medicine is an art, not a trade; a calling, not a business; a calling in which your heart will be exercised equally with your head. Often the best part of your work will have nothing to do with potions and powders, but with the exercise of an influence of the strong upon the weak, of the righteous upon the wicked, of the wise upon the foolish."

(William Osler)
"To die daily, after the manner of St. Paul, ensures the resurrection of a new man, who makes each day the epitome of life." (William Osler)
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