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*Garth Huston

As a Friend and Book Collector

WE ARE GATHERED TO HONOR and give tribute to a friend and esteemed colleague. I would like to add a personal statement—a testimony of Garth as a book collector without peer.

Garth had a number of facets to his life. Above all else he was a family man—husband and father. To many of his professional colleagues and patients he was a gifted physician—a healer in the true sense of the word. A few of us that were particularly fortunate knew Garth as a bookman—a collector, bibliographer, and historian. He was preeminent in each of these roles, and will be remembered for the unique manner in which he filled them.

It has been said that it is more important to pay tribute to good men than to enhance the prestige of the more famous. So this afternoon, rather than rushing through this memorial service, I would like to reminisce a bit, and recall some of the verity and beauty of Garth the bookman and beloved friend—that from his example our own lives might be enriched.

On the wall of St. James Church in London is a bronze medallion memorializing Richard Bright (1789–1858), one of the great nineteenth century students of medicine. A phrase on this plaque from more than a century ago might be attributed to Garth: “He died in the practice of his profession, after a life of unsullied purity, warm affection, and great usefulness.”

Garth grew up loving books. He was a child of the Depression, and might be considered somewhat deprived by contemporary sociological thinking; his family was of modest means, there was no TV or other accoutrements of modern life. However, from his family he inherited a reverence for the written word. Garth worked much of his way through school as a printer, and through his apprenticeship developed an appreciation of fine printing, type fonts, paper, and other points that go into the making of a handsome volume.

Garth's (and my) interest in the history of medicine was greatly stimulated by a somewhat unusual occurrence. As students at the then College of Medical Evangelists in Los Angeles (now Loma Linda University, School of Medicine) we attended a weekly chapel service. At one of these, a young professor of medicine, John E. Peterson, read Sir William Osler's homily, “A Way of Life.” That essay had a great effect on both of our lives, for independently we found our way to Jake Zeitlin's “red barn” on La Cienega Boulevard, and to Dawson's bookshop on Figueroa Street, there to purchase copies of Harvey Cushing's biography of Osler and other medico-historical works. Thus began a lifetime association with these great bookmen.

* Reprinted by permission from *A celebration of living*, the Memorial Service Keepsake for Dr. Huston.

Garth was a year ahead of me in medical school (he was ahead of me in most everything), yet as students we were barely acquainted. It was only in later years—when he was in Iowa and I was at the University of Pennsylvania—that we began to correspond, and become friends. I vividly recall the first time he visited me in Philadelphia. He called, mentioning that he was in the city for an anesthesiology meeting, and asked if he might come out for a day and see my library. Thus on an autumn Saturday afternoon he took the train to my home, which was not far from Valley Forge. He looked over the volumes, and I am sure that he was disappointed in my meager holdings. Nonetheless, he was most gracious, and we talked at length about books, the history of medicine, and Osler. We also talked about his friendship with Sir Geoffrey Keynes and other bookmen. For me it was a wonderful visit that opened a new world. As with long-distance running and deep sea diving, book collecting is a somewhat lonely business. Most people really do not want to hear about a bibliophile's latest great find, even if it is a vellum incunabulum. Thus, book collectors, like medieval monks, tend to lead rather isolated lives. Being able to talk with Garth about books was an exciting and elevating experience. Up to then, my main interest had been in the history of medicine per se. Garth's deep knowledge of many aspects of collecting and bibliography inspired me to become more serious about the whole book business. It was from him that I learned to appreciate some of the finer points of typography, binding, and variant printings.

It was on another of Garth's visits to Philadelphia that I learned how impossible it was to beat him to a find. During a break in a meeting of the American Osler Society, we had gone to the Rittenhouse Book Store together. I was looking for early embryological and obstetrical works, while he was “just browsing,” as he said. Within five minutes he had located a rare volume, Walter Needham's *Disquisitio anatomica . . .* (on the developing fetus), published in 1667, which he took for himself. After over forty-five minutes of further searching I had to be content with a few odd nineteenth century works.

Garth's collecting interests were both catholic and rather specialized. His cache of first and other early editions of the works of Sir Thomas Browne was legendary. Several years ago while working at the Hunterian Library of the University of Glasgow, I met a scholar who was soon to leave for a sabbatical at the Huntington Library. He mentioned that he hoped to visit a doctor in the area who was an authority on seventeenth-century England. “Who might that be?” I asked rather naively. “Well, Garth Huston, of course,” came the reply. Later I learned that Nicolas Barker of the British Library (somewhat analogous to our Library of Congress) was very

impressed with Garth's holdings, particularly his Sir Kenelm Digby collection, which included works that his institution lacked.

Garth also had a wonderful collection of the history of resuscitation including the proceedings of the Royal Humane Society (founded to rescue drowning persons from the Thames—not animals). His collection also included extensive holdings in the works of Sir William Osler, and an essentially complete collection of his special friend and mentor Sir Geoffrey Keynes. Stimulated by his Keynes connection, he gathered the works of three "Johns": John Evelyn, John Donne, and John Ray; as well as several "Williams": William Harvey and William Hazlitt. He also amassed very complete collections of several contemporary fine presses: The Plantin press of his late friend Saul Marks, and fine works from the press of Richard J. Hoffman, who printed the programs for this service.

More than a mere "pack rat" of books, Garth carefully combined the joys of hero worship, and scholarly bibliography. He also took great pleasure in the recent acquisitions of his friends. There were few things he loved more than to examine carefully an incunabulum or "black letter" Caxton that Jack Pincus might show him, or one of Bob Moes' sixteenth century anatomical treasures. On his visits to my home he loved to handle volumes from the presses of Aldus, Baskerville, Elzevir, Oporinus, and Plantin.

Garth had a most severe case of "that incurable illness" bibliomania, and one from which collectors have no desire to be cured. But Garth's passion for collecting was not an end in itself. He once observed that "the personal touch makes the use of a book no routine matter—but a link in the chain of its influence. It becomes more than a mere bound collection of leaves—it is part of the lives of several human beings." To the cynic he would say, "How can we expect to live in the present without a deeper knowledge of the past? History studies the past for the sake of the future. More individuals should come under the wondrous power in books." Another of his favorite sayings was that "next to mother's milk, books are the best food."

Let me not give the impression that books were the only thing important to Garth. Friendships and associations played a preeminent role in his life. Probably his closest associations were with members of the Zamorano Club, a group of rare book collectors in Southern California. Jake Zeitlin (beloved bookman who all too frequently offered some rare and exquisitely bound vellum volume that one could not afford, but could not afford to miss), Ward Ritchie, Dick Hoffman, Muir and Glen Dawson, Jack Pincus, Bob Moes, Earl Nation, and many more. Their friendship and affection were particularly dear to Garth.

Garth was active in other book-oriented groups: the Rounce and Coffin Club (connoisseurs of fine printing), the Grolier Club of New York (perhaps the most distinguished of such organizations), and the International Association of Bibliophiles. He belonged to these groups, not because of any snobbery or one-upmanship, for such feelings were totally foreign to him, but because of the warm associations he had

with fellow bibliophiles—bibliomaniacs if you please—around the world.

As a historian of medicine Garth was active in several organizations—particularly the American Osler Society, of which he was a member of the Council for six years, and President. He also attended meetings of the American Association for the History of Medicine, serving on the Council of that organization for the past four years.

"Friends" of libraries are rather special people, and Garth was a "friend" to more libraries than anyone I have ever known: the Osler Library at McGill, the Trent Collection at Duke, the Sterling Library at Yale, the National Library of Medicine, and the Huntington Library. Garth helped to found the Friends of the Loma Linda University Libraries, and was its president for the first two years (1970–1972). He was a "friend" of the Los Angeles County Medical Association Library, and served as vice-president of that group for the past ten years. Garth also was a "patron" of the Library of Occidental College and served on its Board of Governors the past several years. A collection particularly dear to his heart was the Wood Library of the American Society of Anesthesiology. He played a key role in the founding and the work of that group, and served for many years on its Board of Trustees. This past March his fellow Wood Library trustees informed the Hustons that they were naming their rare book room in Garth's honor.

Because of his considerable knowledge and expertise in things bibliographical and historical, Garth was frequently asked to lecture. At the centenary celebration of the National Library of Medicine he spoke on the subject perhaps closest to his heart: "The Physician as Bibliographer and Bibliophile." For his Lewis Wright Memorial Lecture to the American Society of Anesthesiologists he presented "Gardner Q. Colton, itinerant chemist, '49er, and proponent of anesthesia." Before the Osler Society of London and for his presidential address to the American Osler Society he considered "Sir Geoffrey Keynes and the Oslerian Tradition." To the Medical Society of London and the Royal Humane Society he discoursed on the history of resuscitation. Just two weeks hence he was to have lectured to the International Symposium on the History of Anesthesia, on "Origins of Resuscitation in the USA." His son, Garth Jr., will deliver that address.

Garth also edited and published several works including John Coakley Lettsom's "Hints on Medical Education," a checklist of the works of Sir Kenelm Digby, as well as the latter author's "Digby's honour maintained," and Sir William Osler's unfinished essay "Sir Kenelm Digby's Powder of Sympathy." Because of his tremendous grasp of so many arcane areas, particularly the history of resuscitation, I used to prod Garth ("bug" was the word he used) to publish more and to write the definitive history of resuscitation. He would just laugh and retort that it was too bad we weren't interested in the same area, so that, as he said, "I could do the reading and you could do the writing."

During the past six months, Garth knew the nature of his disease and its prognosis. Nonetheless, he did not just lie back and feel sorry for himself. He gave us all a good

example in his continued good cheer and his use of every moment to advantage. A true Oslerian, like Sir William, his personal ideals were “to do the day’s work well and not to bother about tomorrow . . . to act the Golden Rule, as far as in him lay . . . and to maintain such a measure of equanimity as would enable him to bear success with humility, the affection of his friends without pride, and to be ready when the day of sorrow and grief comes to meet it with courage befitting a man.”

Well, I could continue most of the afternoon recounting examples of Garth’s contributions to bibliography—and to life. In fact, I rather imagine that he would be a bit amused by all of this—suggesting that perhaps instead of sitting here our time could be better spent—“with a good book.” For all I know, Garth may be up in heaven right now, checking over the vellum-bound volumes in the celestial library, making sure the typography is perfect, the bindings have no cracks, and seeing if he can discover any variant printings.

In conclusion, Garth left this world inordinately better for having lived among us. This is the highest end towards which one can strive. As Shakespeare wrote (*Hamlet*, Act I, Scene 2): “He was a man, take him for all in all, I shall not look upon his like again.”

Garth leaves Pauline, his three children, and five grandchildren who remember him with love. The several hundred members of his bibliophile family—which extends around the world—hold him in deep affection, respect, and esteem. He was the kind of person Mark Twain referred to when he said “even the undertaker hates to see him go.”

We will all greatly miss Garth. In particular:

I shall miss his sending me a catalogue from time to time, pointing out a fine volume that I may have missed.

I shall miss his calling every week or so to tell me about a new discovery he had made, and always being certain that I was brought up to date on Garth Jr.’s accomplishments.

I shall miss his Osler-like notes, written in his beautiful calligraphic script, and informing me of some obscure bibliographic pearl or suggesting a volume I should examine.

I shall miss his rare scholarship and inspiration to be better informed about bookish matters.

I shall miss his wise counsel.

I shall miss his warm laugh.

I shall miss this good-natured man of peace.

In a letter to his son, Sir Thomas Browne, whose writings Garth loved so deeply, observed: “Live unto the dignity of thy nature, and leave it not disputable at last, whether thou hast been a man.”

Certainly Garth’s life exemplified these words. And so—rather than a dirge for the dead—let this service be a celebration of living. Let us pray, God, that as family and friends we will not soon forget the lessons that Garth left us of a life well-lived, “a life of unsullied purity, warm affection, and great usefulness.”

Lawrence Longo, M.D.