

THE  
PRESENTATION OF THE  
• BIBLIOTHECA OSLERIANA •

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A paper read before the  
Members of the Osler Club (London)  
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by

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When, some while ago, it was suggested that I should address the Osler Club this evening, the subject which naturally came to my mind as the most suitable one was that of the actual preparation of the catalogue of Sir William Osler's library, the Bibliotheca Osleriana. The possibility of being able to give you in addition my impressions of the installation of the library at Montreal and its Dedication on May 29 had hardly occurred to me; but what seemed at first a remote possibility developed, through an act of true Oslerian kindness, into an actual reality; and from May 26 to 29 I found myself in a beautifully equipped room in the Medical Faculty at McGill University, with Osler's books, with which I had for many years been acquainted at Oxford, around me. I propose therefore in the first place to tell you of the preparation of the Catalogue, and then to conclude with a short description of the Dedication ceremony.

#### The Preparation of the Osler Catalogue

You will bear with me, I hope, if I preface what I have to say on this subject by one or two personal remarks which to a large extent explain my connection with it. I have for many years had the privilege of being on the staff of the Bodleian, of which Osler, as Regius Professor of Medicine, became an ex officio Curator in 1905. I entered the Library in 1908. Strange enough, in my earlier years, apart from the mere recognition of Osler as the Regius Professor and therefore a Curator and consequently one of those important persons whose smallest desires had to be, if possible, anticipated or at any rate carried out with special alacrity, I have no very definite recollection of him. To me he was, in those days, a figure more than a personality. I saw and learned enough to know that he took keen interest in all that concerned the Library, and that he was a tower of strength to my Chief, Mr. E.W.B. Nicholson - a Librarian to whom the Bodleian of modern times owes more than has

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yet been realized. One day, while I was working for my degree, as I ascended the Bodley stairs, I heard a light step behind me, a hand was laid upon my shoulder, and I heard Osler's voice - "Well, how go the examinations?" We talked for a moment as we ascended the Jacobean staircase. From that time there was a friendship between us; and there are others in "Bodley" for whom Osler's sympathy and encouragement forged bonds of a similar nature and a connexion equally unforgettable.

Later, at the beginning of the War period, Osler was in need of a temporary helper to replace his secretary - to do small things in the evening, to pay bookbills, to catalogue his new books; and for the first time I entered 13 Norham Gardens. The first evening I entered his home, Osler gave me a latchkey; this must have been in 1916; and it was only at the beginning of this year, when Lady Osler's executors handed over the house, that that key was returned. So began my connexion with Osler and his Library.

Let us now turn to the Catalogue. "There is no better float through posterity than to be the author of a good bibliography." So wrote Osler of John Shaw Billings; so of Albrecht Haller and of Conrad Gesner. Perhaps we need no such reminder of Osler himself. His memory will, I think, always abide among those who practice medicine; among the smaller number of those who study its history or wander along its literary ~~meadows~~; among the members of this and similar clubs; and in a wider circle. The Principles of Practice of Medicine is not likely to be entirely superseded with the years or ever forgotten; Aequanimitas will remain. This Club will grow and keep Osler's personal memory green. It will fulfil the wish of the Editors if this Catalogue, the largest piece of bibliographical work connected with Osler's name, may go down to posterity side by side with them.

In the days when I first knew it, Osler's catalogue, which he kept on

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large typed cards, with different colours for the different centuries, was, except for one or two particular classes, in one long alphabetical series; certain books on the heart, destined for Johns Hopkins, were also kept apart; and, I believe, the cards for the bibliographical works as well. On his cards, as opportunity offered, Osler was in the habit of adding his notes and appraisals; sometimes he added the notes in the books themselves. A typical catalogue card, which incidentally bears traces of revision by all of the Editors, is illustrated by Dr. Wushing in his Life of Osler. Books and cards were being added frequently, and when I first began working, I made many cards for volumes which I found in the collection uncatalogued. There were, in addition, more than one card (under editors, commentators &c.) for a large number of the works, in the style of the catalogue of a larger library. This was how I found the catalogue before I left for military service. I returned in 1919 to more serious work on the books. To Miss J.F. Wilcock, a practised bibliographer who had helped over Osler's Incunabula Medica, the "aged vestal" of one of his letters, Osler had explained his scheme in outline; she had been busy during the latter part of the War in working the alphabetical series into sections and in recataloguing. While this division into eight sections had been roughly done, there were waiting numerous individual points for Osler to find time to decide. He was busy at this time, as ever, and I personally had little or no talk with him about the details of his scheme; but the groundwork of the present catalogue was there, with the notes which Miss Wilcock had made; and it is obvious that during those sad days of the latter part of the War the work had occupied Sir William's thought very largely — it had, let us hope, given his sad heart some solace.

After Osler's death, it became the earnest wish of Lady Osler that the work should be continued at Oxford, with the collaboration of Dr. B.E. Francis, Dr. Archibald Wolloch, Mr. Leonard L. Mackall and myself, all of whom had been named



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by Osler. In these days, and for some time afterwards, Dr. Francis was working in Geneva in an official post, and Dr. Malloch at hospital work in London. I worked steadily at the technical side of things, and Dr. Malloch helped at weekends, but for some considerable time he was mainly occupied with his duties as one of Osler's literary executors. It was not until after a year that we were able to settle to the work in any sense together or to develop a definite modus operandi.

Our task was to try and interpret Osler's wishes - a task which we realised was not one to be lightly undertaken or easily or quickly carried out. My colleagues had knowledge of medicine and medical history; I only of library matters and bibliography. My colleagues had often talked to Osler of the scheme; and we all knew of the one or two catalogues which he specially admired, the great catalogue of the Hunterian Library at Glasgow had always appealed to him as a fine and dignified piece of work; while Ferguson's Bibliotheca Chemica was daily, almost hourly, in his hands, and was a model of bio-bibliographical information of which he never tired of talking.

The chief feature of Osler's catalogue is, of course, his Bibliotheca Prima, and this is, so far as we know as we know, unique. It was his own personal idea. If it had an origin elsewhere than in his own conception, it was probably inspired by the motto from Sir Thomas Browne which has been printed at the beginning of the first section of the catalogue. "'Tis not a melancholy Utinam of my own, but the ~~desires~~ desires of better heads, that there were a general Synod ... for the benefit of learning, to reduce it as it lay at first, in a few and solid Authors." (Religio Medici) This note was found among the material which Osler left for the introductions to the catalogue to which I shall refer later. We had no hand in its choice, and I personally never saw it until it was sent to the printer. Yet how apt it is!

When the Classical Association visited Oxford in 1916, Osler invited them to the house. He had put out for them to inspect 20 representative treasures from his B.P., and presented them with a little printed flysheet explaining his scheme. A quotation from this will be found at p. x of the Editors' Preface. He had discussed the details with his bibliographical friends - with Mr. Charles Bayle of Cambridge, who unfortunately did not live to see the catalogue completed; and with Prof. A.W. Pollard and my late chief, Mr. Falconer Madan, happily still with us. There were not wanting persons to point out the difficulties inherent in such a project of division - the difficulty, for example, of deciding logically into which section a book should go, science, literature or history, when it might belong to all or none. In spite of ~~that~~ Osler persisted in the idea; and it was for us to go ahead. There was always the index by the aid of which these troublesome matters were to be got over. This was Osler's sheet-anchor - it has been even more than that to his editors. In one respect we have had to enlarge considerably on his original plan - with regard to subject headings in the index. To the list of some three or four dozen approved by him in the earlier stages we found it necessary to add very many; the number in the present index is many times that number. One point on which Osler insisted was that in the body of the catalogue cross-references should be eliminated; the numerical sequence of the entries was not to be broken nor the eye disturbed by occasional references from one heading to another. All such cross-references were to be relegated to the index, which - in view of the splitting up into sections - was from the beginning an integral part of his plan. All secondary headings rendered necessary by the Bodleian rules, which for earlier books are extremely comprehensive are to be found there.

The Sections are outlined in the Preface and Introduction to the Catalogue itself, and they need only be briefly referred to here.<sup>†</sup> Bibliotheca Prima:

<sup>†</sup> Mr. Hill here briefly described the sections from pp. x-xii & xxv-xxvi of the Catalogue.

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Bibliotheca Secunda: Bibliotheca Litteraria: Bibliotheca Historica: Bibliotheca Biographica: Bibliotheca Bibliographica: Incunabula: Manuscripts: Addenda.

It had been Osler's intention to write separate introductions to all of these sections, to explain and illustrate their particular significance; and it remains our lasting regret that this was not possible. The material which he left for a general introduction has been included and forms incidentally an interesting bio-bibliographical record of himself. That to Bibliotheca Litteraria, the only other introduction which he even began, has been used as notes under certain entries in that section.

The work which we found to do may be summarized as follows: the revision of the cards, some 8,000, in accordance with the Bodleian rules; the cards had been typed at various times by unskilled persons; some entries had no details or bibliographical accuracy; certain composite works involving many headings, for instance no. 432, which covers 22 authors besides editors and commentators, had been placed under all the headings involved, and much elimination was necessary. For such composite works Dr. Francis cleverly invented the appropriate term of "shotguns".

All the cards had to be compared with the books, and duplicate cards cancelled and replaced by index-headings. Osler's notes had to be copied from the books, and his quotations checked and verified - not always an easy task. Uniform sizing had to be adopted. Shelfmarks had to be added on the books and on the cards. Slips for all headings had to be written for the index. The final numbers also had to be decided and placed in the books and on the cards. The Incunabula and Manuscripts had to be specially catalogued. Loose leaves and insertions had to be fastened in the books. Occasionally a book had to be thrown out -- included in the catalogue by mistake; but more often it was a question of scrutinising particular volumes to see on what grounds Osler had included them in

his collection at all. Last, but not least, there was the thorny problem of splitting up an author's works. Then later there had to be decided forms of type, page, numbers and so on. In the later stages of the work, the main responsibility fell upon Dr. Francis and myself, Dr. Malloch having accepted a post in New York. The proofs, however, were read by all the Editors, and our notes and suggestions compared and considered. In certain instances we were specially helped - in Litteraria by Dr. Keynes's invaluable bibliography of Sir Thomas Browne; in the Incunabula section by Mr. Scholderer of the B.M. and by Dr. Arnold Klebs; and in the MS. section by Dr. Craster of the Bodleian. Professor Kelsey Wright, a dear friend of Osler's, and Dr. John Fulton, reinforced our efforts with advice and practical help.

The work was long drawn out; but the Catalogue at length became an accomplished fact. A copy lies before us. The Editors cannot help being conscious of a feeling of satisfaction - not indeed that they have achieved perfection or the ideal which Osler himself would have reached; they are only conscious that they have done their best. It is easy (and I will always be a pleasant temptation) to look at the Bibliotheca Osleriana as it might have been. Osler once said that he would take 10 years over his catalogue; we, working most of us part time, have taken little less. From the medical, the historical and the biographical point of view we have been in a more fortunate position. Being in close touch with "Bodley" we could make ready use of the larger sources of reference; to embark on extensive bibliographical research was in fact a temptation which had at times to be resisted. I had hoped that this book would have been in the hands of the reviewers before my paper was read; for criticisms are bound to be expressed. The acknowledgments which we have so far received are full of commendation; perhaps the happiest of them is that from the Secretary of this Club - to the effect that a work on so large a scale

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is bound to meet with criticism and by some be misunderstood. "But", said the Secretary, "it will outlive them all." It has been remarked by a bibliographer that the Catalogue gives no indication of the extent of the book described, the number ~~of~~ pages and so on. This is a fair criticism. but it is to be remembered that the book is intended primarily as a guide to an accessible collection rather than as a general bibliographical instrument. Perhaps I may be allowed to anticipate the criticism that, in a large number of entries in the Index, covering more than one section of the Catalogue, it is impossible to say without some trouble which entry is that of a particular book or if a particular work of a given writer exists in the library at all. The critic should bear in mind that the division into sections has been done with a definite educational purpose, and that it has been assumed that the student will not grudge the time spent in looking over a number of entries. May he not find in his search treasures new as well as old?

I would add a few words with regard to the books themselves. As the sections reflect the main purpose which Osler had in the formation of his library, so some of his special tastes are shown in the special parts of the collection. An instance of this is the loving care which he bestowed on the collecting, the completing, and the special binding of his magnificent collection of Sir Thomas Browne; and even a superficial glance at the catalogue will not fail to tell of several others.

With regard to one class of books/<sup>we</sup>were governed by conflicting feelings. No thorough cataloguing had ever been done of the innumerable books and articles written by Osler himself; and we were convinced that no wish had ever existed that any special attention should be drawn to the important place which Osler himself should hold in Bibliotheca Secunda and Bibliotheca Litteraria. We did what seemed merely just - and indeed from the librarian's point of view necessary -



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without putting Osler's own work in an sense into the foreground. Oslerians, at the end of the A. section, is only a very brief record of the papers left at his death, some already published, some unpublished and not intended by him for posthumous publication. His reprints, over 300 in number, are set out at no. 357e; and one may well reiterate here, before a body of young medical students, the advice which he gives at one point about the preservation of complete sets of one's own reprints.

As to the source of the books - as he says, at the end of his unfinished introduction - They have come from three sources - sales, catalogues and second-hand bookshops. He would have added also, as the gifts of dear friends. They were mostly purchased, however, and the purchases cover the period of his life almost. He bought Browne's from 1808 until the time of his death. One of his greatest desiderata in anaesthesia, the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal, was opened by him on his deathbed and has a pathetic note inscribed within its cover. Several valuable books in more recent years were acquired from a gift made by his <sup>brother</sup> brother, the late Sir Edmund Osler. A great many were presents from his friends, and have been duly acknowledged in the catalogue. No doubt they stand for many kindnesses bestowed on the donors by Osler himself. Mention must be made of the numerous gifts by Mr. L.L. Mackall.

With a knowledge of books which in my belief is unrivalled, and with a rare skill in unearthing copies of rariora, Mr. Mackall was able to acquire, and with great liberality presented from time to time, such treasures as the original edition of the De Trinitatis erroribus of Servetus, and, after Sir William's death and just in time to get into the catalogue, the rare Dutch edition of the works of Sir Thomas Browne. The history of many of the books, before they reached the Osler Library, may be judged from the long list in the

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Index under the heading **Bookplates**. Several of the **MS.** came from the **Phillipps Library**; one or two printed books from the famous **Eloss collection**. I remember the joy which **Osler** showed when he secured at auction a number of important and handsomely-bound bibliographical works from the well-known library of **Mr. George Lunn**, the celebrated English collector who died some years ago.

The list on Page **xxx**, entitled '**Distribution of special books to other Libraries**' will show that in his collecting **Osler** was governed by no selfish aims. Throughout his life he was generous with books, as in all else; and he presented copies of books to other libraries where he thought they were more needed or more properly belonged. The gift of these valuable manuscripts to important libraries was a continuation of the policy of his lifetime - for he made the list upon his deathbed.

**Men and Books** were the love of his life. To these were his energies devoted, a lifelong service given. His books were tools to his hand in the hours of his toil; they were his friends and companions in his leisure moments; reminiscences of happy days and of delightful associations; a solace in the years of overwhelming sadness. These he has left behind him, an incentive to the young of future generations to profit by the lives as well as by the written works of their predecessors; a thank-offering to the University which trained him in his earliest years; a memorial which will endure.

I would add a word about the collaborators in the work. That our task could be carried on at **Osler's** own home at **Merham Gardens**, with difficulties smoothed out by the constant care and foresight of **Lady Osler**, was indeed a happy thing. From 1921 **Dr. Francis** worked daily on the task; **Dr. Malloch** fairly constantly for a considerable time before his call to **New York**; myself consistently in the evenings. All the proofs were seen in addition by **Mr. Mackall**, who wrote long



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letters, themselves marvels of bibliography, about them. Mr. R.K. Fretman, my Bodley colleague, whom it is a very great pleasure to have here this evening, worked for several years; and the more technical part of the Catalogue owes very much to his patient skill and accuracy. It is difficult to express our indebtedness to him. Like the members of this Club, he never actually worked side by side with Sir William; but it was not long before Osler meant to him much more than a memory. The Printers to the University, at the Clarendon Press who bore with us in our long delays, have a very definite share in the Catalogue; their high standard is known; and it is sufficient to say that the book does them credit.

I refer to the greatest collaborator last of all; for, in her noble resolve to carry out her husband's plans, Lady Osler put the work and the workers always before herself. It would have been our supreme satisfaction if she, who dedicated the last years of life to it, had been here to see the culmination of a task which was essentially hers. The few words which we have written in our dedication are a feeble attempt at expressing our feelings and our unbounded gratitude. Several years ago I chanced upon two lines written for his epitaph by an ancient Oriental, and I have often thought how appropriate to Sir William and Lady Osler the words might have been -

"When I am gone, look for my epitaph,  
Not in the grave, but in the hearts of men."

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From Mr. R.H.Hill  
Bodleian Library  
Oxford.

12 April, 1943

Dear Dr. Rosencrantz,

I am ashamed at my delay in writing to thank you for your letters of November 13 and January 6 and 30. I lead a very busy life, in the Library and out, at accustomed and unaccustomed jobs, as you can imagine, and I am afraid that private and unofficial correspondence sometimes gets left.

I have to express our gratitude too for the delightful parcel of goodies which came recently and gave us much pleasure, particularly the <sup>dates</sup> figs and raisins, which we do not see very often now! It was very nice of you to think of us in that way, especially as some things must be getting rather short with you in America. Thank you very much. Some day we shall hope to express our thanks in person, when you come to pay your promised visit to Oxford.

I am very glad to have the reprint about your Osler collection, and I hope I may some day see the books and papers themselves. I have just had fall into my hands a copy of Mr. Muirhead's memoir of Lady Osler and I should very much like to send it to you if you have not already got a copy. Will you please let me know? The Librarian is grateful for the second copy of the Osler photograph. You will readily understand that we are not hanging any more portraits in the Old Library at the moment, partly for safety's sake and partly because we have to complete the extension scheme after the war by alterations of Bodleian rooms. We will therefore, if we ~~any~~, keep the portrait unframed for the present and see about its position when things settle down again. It shall not be forgotten. Nor shall your request for a copy of my little talk on the preparation of the 'Bibliotheca Osleriana'; that was unfortunately never printed and only two or three copies were typed. When time allows, I will type off one or two more copies and one shall then come to you and another shall go to the Osler Club (before ~~whom~~ it was delivered); for their collection seems to have been completely lost in the

London fires. I wish it had occurred to me to have had the collection brought here for safety- but our minds were taken up with other things and one never quite knew which place was safer than any other! I shall be sending you one or two little pamphlets about the Bodleian and shall later hope to be able to shew you the Library.

With renewed thanks for your letters and your very kind gift,

Believe me,

Very Sincerely Yours,

R. Hill