

## Book Reviews

*Wm. Osler: The Continuing Education*, by JOHN P. MCGOVERN and CHARLES G. ROLAND, Springfield Illinois C. C. Thomas, 1969, pp. xvii, 365, illus., \$13.75.

*A Way of Life*, by WILLIAM OSLER with a foreword by JOHN P. MCGOVERN, Springfield, Illinois, C. C. Thomas, 1969, pp. ix, 41, \$3.95.

There is more need than ever before for a diffusion of the philosophy of Sir William Osler amongst the technologists of medicine. It is a need which medical students feel when, as they leave the university preclinical laboratories and enter the hospital wards for the first time, they encounter a dilemma in the countless possibilities of scientific investigation and laboratory controlled treatment, demanding a vigilance and fortitude which could easily submerge the personalities of both the patient and his doctor. Dr. W. Clarke Wescoe in his commentary on Sir William's address at the Faculty of Medicine, McGill University in January 1895 on 'Teaching and Thinking: The Two Functions of a Medical School' reflects on what Sir William's thoughts might be on our present situation.

I suspect in part he would be pleased, but even in larger part displeased, for what he feared has, in large measure come to pass. In the letter to Rensen he expressed his anxieties about the whole-time system, as he did in a much briefer letter to George Dock in 1912: 'But what I dread is to have a class of clinicians growing up out of touch, and necessarily out of sympathy with the profession and the public. This would be nothing short of a calamity.' At this point, we seem now to have arrived. . . .

Osler taught in this address, as he did throughout his career that 'A man cannot become a competent surgeon without a full knowledge of human anatomy and physiology, and the physician without physiology and chemistry flounders along in an aimless fashion, never able to gain any accurate conception of disease', adding one of the aphorisms in which this paper abounds, 'practising a sort of popgun pharmacy, hitting now the malady and again the patient, he himself knowing not which.' This scientific, educational background is now an established part of medical teaching, although some, frightened by its ever-increasing volume, feel that the problem needs restating as an *embarras de richesse*.

In the fourteen well-chosen essays on medical education in its broadest aspect, there is inevitably some dating of Osler's material, but not of his ideology. Although it is at times possible to detect a conflict within himself concerning problems that have become even more difficult to resolve today. 'Remarks on Specialism' was delivered as a presidential address to the Pediatric Society at Boston in 1892. 'The desire for expert knowledge is, however, now so general that there is a grave danger lest the family doctor should become, in some places, a relic of the past.'

And a later comment is no less apposite today: 'Very little additional knowledge enables the general practitioner to grapple with a large proportion of the cases which in the cities comes under the care of the specialist.'

With a reminder to his particular audience, 'In the evolution of the specialist, the children's doctor is the last to appear, not because of any extreme differentiation, but rather he is a vestigial remnant of what was formerly in cities the general practitioner'.

But Osler knew then that the rapid increase in knowledge had made concentration of work a necessity, 'specialism is here, and here to stay'.

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Only three of the essays are taken from *Aequanimitas*, which is still readily available. The value of the collection is greatly enhanced by the commentaries of the fourteen distinguished American medical specialists and librarians, which puts each essay critically in perspective. In the sum of its parts, it is a book which may be read and enjoyed by those who are interested in medical education and its destination.

*A Way of Life* has been described as 'a lay sermon which an archbishop might not be ashamed to have written'. The way of life that it preaches is the practice of living for the day only, and for the day's work, *Life in day-tight compartments*. It is an elegantly produced volume, which arrives from the publisher unopened. Part of the preparation for its reading is the leisurely opening of the leaves with your silver-bladed knife. If you like a sermon, this is a good one.

JOHN CULE

*Simpson and Syme of Edinburgh*, by JOHN A. SHEPHERD, Edinburgh and London, E. & S. Livingstone, 1969, pp. xvi, 288, illus., £2.10.

This account of the lives of James Syme and James Young Simpson provides the opportunity for Mr. Shepherd to give a fascinating impression of Edinburgh and its medical school during the nineteenth century. Syme and Simpson were born in 1799 and 1811 respectively and both died in 1870. Except for Syme's brief appointment to University College Hospital, London, both spent their professional lives in Edinburgh. The characters of the two men are assessed and it is remarkable how different they were. Syme's personality demands sympathetic study and considerable insight, and this the author shows throughout. Simpson's dynamic drive is evident and so is his relentless pursuit of knowledge. A lesser character might have made Simpson's discoveries; but it needed the great Simpson to publicize them and develop them so that in no time medicine had been transformed.

Some writers have suggested that Simpson does not deserve the credit for the striking advance made when chloroform anaesthesia was introduced. This is the continuation of opposition he encountered all his life. His revelation of his discovery was perhaps the quickest in medical history. John Burton, John Leake, Charles White and Alexander Gordon showed that puerperal fever is contagious, but it needed Oliver Wendell Holmes to make the world accept the fact. Simpson discovered and publicized as well. Advances and discoveries have had to be presented to the profession in a convincing manner or there is no progress.

Mr. Shepherd's description of Acupressure explains why the theory of Simpson was such an important concept in the surgery of the time.

So many biographies are eulogistic to the point of nausea, but this one not at all. It is a book which the most critical will enjoy and read to the end. In fact, it is just the birthday present for the doctor, young or old, particularly the one who has no liking for fiction and whose dislikes make him hard to please.

The references make the book a work for the medical historian; but they do not impinge on the reader because they and the associated notes are given at the end of the book.

ALISTAIR GUNN