It is de rigueur for anyone who essays to discuss any facet of the character the interests or the personality of William Osler to declare that everything worth saying has already been voiced by abler people. A second tenet is to admit one's unworthiness for the task. Both of these ritualistic conventions apply in the present instance but, at least, I shall not pretend to write about W.O. and use the most tenuous of connections to embark on an essay on environmental pollution or fractures of the femoral neck. No indeed, I ride my own hobby horse as a former incumbent of Osler's first office in The Canadian Medical Association and plagiarize the works of my betters to call to your attention certain aspects of his relationship to organized medicine. The previous sentence means that, like everyone else, I'll have recourse to Harvey Cushing's "Life" to mine the rich lode for the evidence I require. Most Osler Orations have their genesis in the Index and this modest effort is no exception.

For the statistically minded I'll record that under Associations and Societies there are listed no fewer than 110 titles, several of them with 30 or more references. Further to refine the data, 45 of these were American, 43 British, 13 Canadian, five International, and four French. The index names 45 hospitals, 43 clubs, 39 libraries, and 12 congresses but, oddly, the category Journals, is not represented. It would be an exaggeration to state that he was a dues-paying member of each of these organizations but in a surprising number he was. He held many offices, he worked hard, he advanced the policies which he had been influential in framing and in all of them he had personal contact and involvement. Fortunately, he lived in day-tight compartments, because it must have been an exhausting task for somebody to keep his engagements straight. In this busy side of his life he was doubtless motivated by his natural gregariousness but more by his "loyalty to the best interests of the noblest of callings".

UNIVERSITIES

If the academics will permit me to refer to a Faculty of Medicine as an element of our organism, Osler was a member of the Toronto School, McGill, Pennsylvania, Johns Hopkins and Oxford, and full Professor at the latter four. Honorary degrees from other universities have eluded my count but they were multiple. Apart from revealing him as a restless creature who succumbed readily to invitations, the record is unusual even among the mobile Ph.D.'s of our day. In addition to full participation in the development of his medical schools, he was President of the Ameri-

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can Association of Medical Colleges in 1895, which, I would remind you, was 16 years before Flexner shook them up.

ASSOCIATIONS AND SOCIETIES

In 1903 he addressed the centennial meeting of the New Haven Medical Association on "The Educational Value of the Medical Society". Among other things he said, "The well-conducted medical society would represent a clearing house in which every physician of the district could receive his intellectual rating and in which he would find out his professional assets and liabilities." Nobody could speak with greater authority because W.O. had already been an active member of a great many societies. A man of his temperament and innate friendliness could not be a unit of the great silent majority; he had to participate, to stimulate, to speak and to act and he experienced the fate of catalysts in being elected to office.

He was 23 when he qualified at McGill in 1872, five years too late to have been one of the founding members of the C.M.A. I find it strange that he had not organized the Canadian Association of Medical Students and Interns, but it took a further 66 years before that society emerged. After two years of study in Europe, made possible by the generosity of his brother, Edmund, he returned to Montreal and to the appointment of Lecturer in the Institutes of Medicine at McGill. He had undertaken extensive clinical training under the European masters and conducted an early investigation into blood platelets, a study which led to his membership in the Royal Microscopical Society.

A representative sample of the Montreal organizations which he founded, joined, supported, revived or stimulated during the period 1873-76 are: the Journal Club, the Metropolitan Club, the Microscopical Club, the Natural History Society, the
McGill Medical Society, the Montreal Medical-Chirurgical Society, and the Montreal Veterinary Medical Association.

By 1877 when the 10th meeting of the C.M.A. was held in Montreal in September under the Presidency of the great Joseph Workman, W.O. was the people's choice as Chairman of the Committee on Arrangements, Secretary of the Committee on Publications, Editor of the Transactions, and also the contributor of two papers to the scientific program as well as the author of the report on necrology.

Cushing relates that four years later, in 1881, "This same swarthy young Canadian had returned home too late to attend another meeting, namely of The Canadian Medical Association held in Halifax early in August, and was penalized for his absence by election to the onerous position of General Secretary." Our William did not act as though he were reluctant, but threw himself into the duties with every evidence of enthusiasm and did his usual good job. A tenure of only three years, he was elected President, in 1884, when he was barely 35. Shortly thereafter he accepted a call to the University of Pennsylvania, and he came up from Philadelphia to Chatham, Ontario, to preside at the 18th Annual Meeting in September 1885. Originally scheduled for Winnipeg, the troubles of the second Riel uprising caused the locale of the meeting to be changed to the relative tranquility of Chatham. His Presidential Address on "The Growth of a Profession" was a long and serious one which must have represented a considerable expenditure of midnight oil when he was settling into his new Professorship. He demonstrates a detailed knowledge of registration and licensure, an intimate familiarity with Canada's 11 medical schools and a burning desire to foster medical associations, local, provincial and national. Although nobody could call him a misogynist, I regret to report that he had a few discouraging words to say about the two Canadian medical schools for women which were enjoying evanescent existence at the time.

Significantly, in the 12 years since his eligibility for C.M.A. membership, he had risen to the highest office in The Association. In an era when grey hair, seniority, and fulsome oratory were held in high esteem, our forefathers recognized and rewarded merit. His efforts for the Canadian profession had been exerted in the years preceding his Presidency of the C.M.A.

His residence in the United States 1884-1905 covers a period far longer than he had been doctoring in his native land, but his relationship to the American Medical Association was neither as close nor as cordial. He was a member, of course, and not infrequently a contributor to the scientific program and to the J.A.M.A., but he had at least two clashes with the Trustees. The first occurred early, in 1885, while he was actually C.M.A. President and a newcomer to Philadelphia. He had become an active participant in the arrangements for the IX International Medical Congress scheduled for Washington. The recommendations of the eminent Dr. John S. Billings with respect to organization and guest speakers had been scuttled by the A.M.A. hierarchy. Osler organized protests in Philadelphia, New York, Boston and Baltimore with the result that the medical leaders from the nations to be represented withdrew to the great detriment of the Congress. The next clash occurred in 1895 when the A.M.A. met in Baltimore and W.O. was, as usual, deeply involved in local arrangements and host to many friends. The Report of the Committee on Nominations included the recommendation that Dr. W. B. Atkinson, who had been Secretary for 31 years, be re-elected. The question was about to be put to the House of Delegates but, to the dismay of the Committee, Dr. Osler rose in his place and said in part, "I stand here and say plainly and honestly before Dr. Atkinson what I and many other members of The Association have said behind his back, that he is not an efficient Secretary of this Association and that we have not found him so." The incumbent was voted to remain in office but I imagine that the protestor was persona non grata to the Board of Trustees for a long time thereafter. When Osler was translated to Oxford in 1905, he found himself more in sympathy with the policies and practices of the B.M.A. He did not hesitate to differ from certain official pro-
nouncements, yet in 1908 he was elected a member of the Council and he served for several years on that authoritative body.

While resident on the other side of the Atlantic, Osler had journeyed to be present at several Annual Meetings of the British Medical Association, and from Oxford he was a regular attendant. A combined meeting of the B.M.A. and the C.M.A. had been arranged for 1906 and early that year he was “in an unofficial capacity soliciting papers for the August meeting of the B.M.A. in Toronto”. His passage had been booked but he was prevented from attending by a series of local crises and upcoming obligations.

The case of the Royal Society of Medicine is a good example of Osler’s influence on medical organization. He had scarcely unpacked his bags at Oxford when he became aware of a movement to amalgamate some 20 medical societies in the city of London. He approved of the endeavour but I imagine that he was not surprised to learn that the proposal had been stalled for years owing to the universal reluctance of doctors and their organizations to lose their identity, even in a good cause. Characteristically, W.O. thought he should give the project a push and, also characteristically, he chose the proper person to talk to. In this instance, it was Sir John MacAlister, secretary of the ancient and prestigious Medical and Chirurgical Society, who had become discouraged at the lack of progress but who was revitalized when Osler gave him a transfusion of encouragement in late 1905. Speaking and writing for the next year, portraying the advantages of a strong society with a first-class library, winning over the diehards with charm and perseverance, our William found his efforts rewarded. The first general meeting was held June 14, 1907, and the Society has proceeded from strength to strength ever since. Osler never held high office but he was a very active member of the Council, a member of the Library Committee, a frequent contributor to the programs, and the founder and first chairman of the Section of the History of Medicine (1912).

I have recently become aware of a letter dated January 4, 1916, to Dr. F. B. Bowman of Hamilton who had elucidated the cause and the treatment of trench mouth in World War I. He says, “Dear Bowman: Did MacAlister ever arrange for your paper at the Royal Society of Medicine either the Dental or Medical Section or both in joint session? I hear the W.(ar) O.(ffice) is to publish the result of your work, which is very gratifying but this should not prevent your reading a paper and bringing out a discussion. Greetings for 1916 to you all. Yours sincerely, Wm. Osler.” It is evident that the Great War was not permitted to impair his support of the R.S.M. nor did it diminish his interest in calling attention to good work, particularly when performed by a Canadian.

Hospitals

The hospital represented Osler’s workshop from his first appointment as physician to the smallpox wards of the Montreal General Hospital in 1875, to his final position as squire of the Radcliffe Infirmary. I have said that his quickening influence was felt by 45 hospitals, not necessarily as a member of the medical staff but as visiting professor, anniversary speaker, consultant or guest at a clinical meeting. It must have represented a great trial to the matron when her ward with its orderly row of neat beds was invaded by Osler’s following of students for rounds or a bedside clinic. His charm needed to be exercised when these innovations were introduced but everyone, including Mrs. Murphy with her enlarged spleen outlined in blue crayon, responded to it. The significance of his contribution to medical education, to patient care and to hospital practices is likely to be overlooked since we are apt to regard it as so natural that it must have always pertained. Harvey Cushing reminds us in the dedication of his “Life” “To medical students—and particularly to those in America, lest it be forgotten who it was that made it possible for them to work at the bedside in the wards.”

Hospitals of all kinds, general, pediatric, orthopedic, mental and fever, hospitals
military and civilian, benefited from his interest and his presence. The wards, the labs, the outpatient department, the nursing school, the dietary arrangements, yes, even the operating theatres and the administration were benefited when he came around. It is reasonable to suggest that the hospital provided the facility and the environment where he expressed himself at his best with patients, students, house staff and mature colleagues, and that the unit represented an essential ingredient in his concept of the mosaic of organized medicine.

PUBLIC HEALTH

When Public Health was emerging to drains, potable water, pure food, and vital statistics, Osler threw his full support behind the movement. When specific preventive procedures were few, he championed vaccinations against smallpox and typhoid. The control of pulmonary tuberculosis engaged his interest and active participation, and he led his colleagues in planning societies, commissions, international conferences, dispensaries and sanatoria. He appreciated early that lay co-operation was essential in combating the Great White Plague and in this field, perhaps more than any other, he worked with non-medical associates and performed outstanding public service. The great infectious killers of his day, smallpox, typhoid and tuberculosis absorbed his clinical and humanitarian interest. He clearly perceived that prevention would be far more effective than the application of his meagre therapeutic resources. How gratified he would be to see the vindication of this conviction, again by medical organization.

LIBRARIES

Libraries? Here we find Osler the bibliophile on his native heath. Fostered by Bovell and Johnson in his early youth, his interest in books increased with the passage of time. From the Bodleian, the Surgeon-General’s, the Vatican, to his gift, in 1908, of $100 to the new library of the Vancouver Medical Association, he was an encourager, a supporter, a contributor of cash and books, a user, a worker, and a loiterer. He was the librarians’ friend and many of his happiest hours were spent either browsing or relentlessly pursuing the volume he required. Much of his correspondence relates to the enjoyment of books, and his delight at acquiring the first edition of a forgotten physician-author shines through a great deal of his writing.

At the opening of the new building of the Boston Medical Library in 1896, he endorsed the value of medical literature: “It is astonishing how little reading a doctor can practice medicine, but it is not astonishing how badly he may do it. Not three months ago, a physician living within an hour’s ride of the Surgeon-General’s Library brought his little girl, aged 12, to me. The diagnosis of infantile myxedema required only a half glance. In placid contentment he had been practising 20 years in “Sleepy Hollow” and not only when his own flesh and blood was touched, did he rouse from an apathy deep as Rip Van Winkle’s sleep. In reply to questions: No, he had never seen anything in the journals about the thyroid gland; he had seen no pictures of cretinism or myxedema; in fact his mind was a blank on the whole subject. He had not been a reader, he said, but he was a practical man with very little time.” There is a certain familiar ring to that last sentence.

Sir Thomas Browne’s “Religio” was the mainstay of his personal collection, now enshrined in the Osler Library, the treasure of McGill. A 1969 reprinting of the “Bibliotheca Osleriana,” first issued in 1929 under the editorship of W. W. Francis, repeats the description of the 7787 items, “A catalogue of books illustrating the history of medicine and science collected, arranged and connotated by Sir William Osler, Bt., and bequeathed to McGill University.”

JOURNALS

I may be wrong and I ask to be corrected when I say that I can’t find evidence that Osler was ever editor of a scientific medical periodic publication. Maybe my trouble is that Cushing has not provided a neat index package under journals. He had his name on the masthead of many journals in the capacity of
member of the editorial board as consultant, correspondent or even associate editor but I don’t believe that he ever had the ultimate editorial responsibility for meeting the payroll and getting the paper on the street. My friend, Charles Roland, reminds me that he was listed in 1907 as Senior Editor of the Quarterly Journal of Medicine and supported by a Board comprising Bradford, Garrod, Hutchison, Rolleston and White. However, he indicates that it was the Secretary, A. G. Gibson, who performed the editorial chores and this instance does not invalidate my assertion. As a contributor he was prolific, as a writer of letters to the editor he excelled, as a voluntary reporter of meetings and events he was assiduous, and as an encourager of editors of faltering publications he must have been a strong support. Their appeals for some Osler “thunder” were rarely ignored. What’s more, he became a subscriber to many publications and his cheque or money order must have represented support in a practical as well as a moral sense.

His first original article appearing in the Canadian Medical Association Journal was published in the October 1911 issue, 10 months after the publication was founded. In the same year, he commenced his “Men and Books” series which appeared intermittently for the next three years. The master index of this journal shows 29 entries from the pen of W.O. As a former Managing Editor of that publication, I hope I may be forgiven a certain ruffling of my feathers at Cushing’s remark: “That he was willing to see them buried in a Canadian journal was not entirely without sentiment on his part . . .” It may have been sentimental but it was sincere regard for the welfare of the organ of his Association that prompted his support of his friend, Andrew Macphail, the first Editor. After all, Harvey, we Canadians must stick together.

From the Royal Society to the Caughnawaga County Medical Association, Osler’s quickening influence was tangible. Always a crusader for better health, he used many organizations to advance the cause, to foster interest among the profession and the public, to encourage scholarship and the historical outlook, and to temper Science with the Art. No one could accuse him of seeking personal advantage, and the responsibilities of office came to him as they do to many catalysts as a consequence of infectious enthusiasm. He served many societies but manipulated none of them to serve him. He enjoyed the company of like-minded colleagues, and his attitude is well expressed in one of the purposes of the founding fathers of the C.M.A., “to excite emulation as well as harmony in the profession and to facilitate and foster friendly intercourse among its members”. It is unusual unless one’s name is Asklepios, Hippocrates, or Sydenham to inspire the eponymous development of societies and clubs. Yet, 50 years after his death, Osler clubs are numerous and world wide, suggesting to me that his interest in organizations as well as the affection he engenders in doctors who never met him, combine to confer a species of immortality. If you should become impatient with the ponderous progress of many units of organized medicine, tired of sitting on committees, disillusioned at the need to accommodate to demands of governments, take heart and think of Osler, the organization man.

Figs. 1 and 2 are reproduced with the kind permission of the Osler Library, McGill University, Montreal.

References