

OSLER LIBRARY NEWSLETTER

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"DEAREST G.": A Domestic Portrait of William Osler drawn from his Egyptian Letters

In the Osler Library there are 27 unpublished holograph letters written by William Osler to his wife, during February and March of 1911, from Egypt, Naples and Rome.⁽¹⁾ These were bound and presented to the Library in 1932 by Lady Osler's sister Sue Chapin. Later, the Osler Librarian W.W. Francis, added dates, indicated the correct sequence, made all too occasional annotations and inserted a letter that he had received from Osler during that period. Also included is a photograph (Ill. 1) sent in 1946 by "Amo" the daughter of Sir Edmund Boyd Osler. The latter had organised a trip to Egypt with the party consisting of Osler and E.B.O., "Amo" and her husband Wilmot Matthews, and two friends, Elsie Bethune and Ernest Cattanaeh.⁽²⁾ Grace Osler could not join them since their son Edward Revere was at school and the Oslers never left England together without him.⁽³⁾ Osler must have been very reluctant to go without his wife, but she apparently pleaded her aversion to the heat and insisted that he go (vide infra).

The adventures of this party in Egypt have been detailed elsewhere⁽⁴⁾. After a few days in Cairo, they boarded the S.S. "Seti", one of Thomas Cook's private Nile steamers, on which they spent a month, travelling to Assuan and back, and visiting interesting places on the way, often on donkeys. After a few more days in Cairo, they moved on to Naples, and finally to Rome where Osler left his companions and returned to England. Other people mentioned in Osler's letters, and germane to this article, include Baroudi the popular Egyptian dragoman on the "Seti", masters from Revere's school, patients, Osler's niece Nona, and Otilie, the daughter of his old friend, William Wright.

Like the selection published by Cushing⁽⁴⁾, these letters contain much about the people that Osler met and the places he saw, but in addition, this collection provides an appealing and intimate portrait of Osler, the loving husband and caring father, concerned about finances and practising medicine, shopping for presents and "dreaming insane dreams."⁽⁵⁾ The excerpts given below are as in the original; no attempt has been made to correct spellings, improve punctuation, or expand abbreviations. The meanings are clear.

The letters almost always begin: "Dearest G." and contain regrets that she is not with him sharing his pleasures; and the rational-



Illustration 1. William Osler dressed for the tropics, between Baroudi and Sir Edmund Boyd Osler.

isation that she would have found the climate unbearable. "I feel so horrid to be off here alone. I fear tho, you would have found your old enemy the sun too much - he begins to pipe up!"⁽⁶⁾ "Hot as hades again today . . . You were right, this is no place for you."⁽⁷⁾ "This pm a 'Khamsin' had come in from the dessert - it is a yellow fog like air but instead of mist 'tis sand. Eyes & nose full - you would loathe it"⁽⁷⁾ "I am alternately sorry & glad you are not with us."⁽⁸⁾ "Today just your day, delicious temperature, nice

Dr. Anand Date, the author of the lead article in this issue of the Newsletter is Professor and Head of the Department of Pathology at the Christian Medical College Hospital, Vellore, India. The Library owes Dr. Date a double debt of gratitude, in that he has also furnished us with a full transcription of Osler's Egyptian letters, supplementing and revising a previous transcription by former Osler Librarian Philip Teigen.

breeze."⁽⁵⁾ "Gee whiz! you would have melted today."⁽⁹⁾ "These donkey trips in the heat you could not stand."⁽¹⁰⁾ "I am glad you were not here yesterday...Scorching hot - you would have died several deaths. It was 92" in the shade & red hot in the sun with sand & dust galore."⁽¹¹⁾ "How glad I am you made me go."⁽¹²⁾ "Most of the days you would have enjoyed, but it was best no doubt to stay."⁽¹³⁾

Gentle endearments are expressed. "Perfectly fascinating eve - only one regret!"⁽¹⁴⁾ "Our parlor is delightful. Amo & Elsie are reading up for tomorrows excursion. EBO & Ernest are playing cards, Wilmot is reading - only a vacant place! but I do so wish you & the laddie were here."⁽¹⁵⁾ "It has been a wonderful holiday. I would not have missed it for a great deal - only one drawback."⁽⁸⁾ "It seems very long since I left you ...! How glad I shall be to get back again"⁽¹¹⁾ "Such a trip - every moment enjoyable! Only one speck in the camera - two specks!"⁽¹²⁾ "The days are flying I shall be with you soon - poor patient Grizal - sitting quietly at home, spinning while I am loafing."⁽¹⁶⁾ There is occasionally an American flavour: "Gee whiz - muz its a long time since I left you!"⁽¹⁷⁾ It is quite a relief when Osler's alter ego - EYD.⁽¹⁸⁾ breaks out: "I am just furious that you are not here. I have no one to squeeze - I cannot squeeze my blood relatives and Elsie B. is too thin."⁽¹⁴⁾ and a month later, "Such a holiday. It has been perfect - everything - only if you had been here. I have had nobody to squeeze & every day there was something which needed muscular effort to help express the emotions."⁽¹⁹⁾

Revere was much on Osler's mind at this time. His son had settled down well at his boarding school Winchester, but he did not have an aptitude for studies and loathed classics. He was interested in butterflies.⁽²⁰⁾ "I have been out buying postal cards & have sent E.R. some good ones of the mummies."⁽²¹⁾ "I am writing to E.R. telling of the donkey &c. No moths or butterflies."⁽¹⁵⁾ "I got a mummied hawk - the sacred one - & a beautiful mummied foot for Revere & a scarab."⁽⁷⁾ "Card from Revere -- very hopeful. Dear lad - please do not worry, that boy will come out all right - good health, sweet disposition - hang the brains - they might only get him into trouble."⁽⁵⁾ "The Winchester letter seems encouraging. Dear lad - No one could help liking him when one got under that Oslerian shell of reserve."⁽²²⁾ From Luxor: "Send this on to Revere - while we were examining the older part a crowd appeared following a snake charmer who was going to all the nooks & corners waving a stick and repeating words and sentences at a great rate, a sort of incantation in which he repeated the names of all the great prophets, Adam, Enoch, Moses, Aaron, Mahomet &c. and this he said would bring out the snakes. In one dark corner he got a cobra...In another part he found a long common snake...He gradually got four or five. Weigall, the Director, says they are usually fakes

& put the snakes in the places over night."⁽²³⁾ "I do hope you have had an encouraging report from the darling."⁽¹¹⁾ "What a comfort to get your telegram yesterday. Dear laddie I am glad he has done better. He may pull up now & do well. We must not be discouraged."⁽¹⁹⁾ Six days later: "Yours with the report came last eve - very encouraging. That Mr Barton has bucked him up a bit & taken an interest I am ahead Little is a stick."⁽²⁴⁾ From Naples: "This afternoon we went to the Aquarium such a treat, marvellous fish. I do wish Revere could have seen it. I must get some postal cards."⁽¹⁷⁾

Pecuniary concerns followed him to Egypt. "So strange that there should be tax bills - do not pay the big one till I get back - Pay any small bills!"⁽²⁵⁾ "Glad Mrs L. has sent cheque to Bank. I can now pay the balance of the Imperial Bank - \$2800 & the other \$1000 must go to the E.R.O. fund. I shall pay my expenses here - have £100 left! Cheap travelling these days!"⁽²⁶⁾ Even when holidaying on the Nile, Osler could not escape from patients and practice. "After dinner I had to go to the Ross's boat as the old man has been ill - looks badly. He never should have left home."⁽²⁵⁾ The Rosses had started up the Nile at about the same time as Osler's party. Next day: "James Ross is not so well, - pericarditis."⁽²⁵⁾ "Poor Mr Ross is not so well. I see him every day. They go on to Asuan tomorrow. He has his doctor, very nice fellow..."⁽⁷⁾ "Mr Ross is better -- he says I have saved his life."⁽⁸⁾ "The Hales are here - poor fellow not yet well. I had a piteous letter from Mrs. H."⁽²⁵⁾ And from Assouan: "This is a perfect paradise and such a climate, never too hot in winter 75-80" and the nights cool. Crowded with English & German invalids"⁽²²⁾ While there "I had a note from a Mrs Dennison . . . asking me to see her husband . . . He has had paralysis & was operated on by Cushing"⁽⁹⁾ As they make their way back down the Nile: "Ross is better but he is following us close & will stick to me he says to the last. His yacht is at Naples & we are to have it to go to Capri &c."⁽¹⁰⁾ From Luxor: "This afternoon I have been practising a case at the Hotel on poor Ross who has a pleurisy."⁽²⁷⁾ "Mr Ross better today but their boat keeps close to us."⁽¹¹⁾ Back in Cairo: "I shall have made more than my expenses. In fact I have not spent more than £10 in all - I have some nice Assiut shawls & will pick up a few good things in Cairo & some little thing that will do for your Bazaar stalls &c."⁽¹²⁾ I am so glad Otilie will come over I expect we can stand it financially I am glad you sent the cheque. I will not have lost much by being away. There are always a good many expenses about me - town & taxis mount up in the course of a month. Only we must save the money for the boy. On the whole we have not done badly but I fear the time when my income will be very small, & expenses the same, or with the boy starting, even larger. Still if anything happened to me you would have \$18,000 and the house - which would

enable you to live & keep up my contributions to the family considering what fat hands we have ('tis Baroudi's phrase) we have done pretty well. And you have been an angel! How you have borne with me all these years!"⁽²⁸⁾ "Yesterday we went shopping. I have buyed a few things for you and the girls, no trash!... I am ordering some cigarettes - as per 1000 with duty &c they only come to \$15 but we pay \$20 at least."⁽²⁹⁾ Soon after arriving in Egypt Osler had written to W.W. Francis: "Pity you are off tobacco as they say (E.B. & Wilmot) that the cigarettes are mild as honey dew."⁽²⁾ "Consultation this pm. & the enclosed bill the result - 2 dresses for you, Nona & Otilie - that nice soft camel hair & silk stuff, all embroidered ... I looked all over the shop for a nice piece of embroidery for the piano - plenty of bits but not one of the color... I have plenty of red shoes & and a few extras. I have bot 1000 cigarettes & enclose the bill - You will have to pay duty about £1.4.0 You see they will come to very much less than our 8s. a 100. They go parcel post."⁽³⁰⁾ And in the last letter from Egypt: "I have bought a number of little things that will be useful. I had two consultations yesterday & it seems right to spend the fees. I am sure you will be pleased."⁽²⁴⁾

And finally for the collectors of Osler's dreams:⁽³¹⁾ "I wish you could see our Capt... at his prayers in the eve, (on his coat for a mat) on deck near the bow. It is really very impressive. And to see the men on the shore at sun-set. 'Tis a great religion. Did I tell you I dreamt it had been introduced into Ch Ch?"⁽⁶⁾ After a visit to "Edfu one of the best of the temples"⁽⁷⁾ "Edfu still lingers in ones memory a dream (By the way I am still dreaming insane dreams)"⁽⁵⁾ And added to the top of one of the last letters from the Seti: "Heavens! I dreamt last night I found you with a baby - 6w old. - such a darling but he was all over the place just like a monkey, & had sat for an hour at the window n. chas st & had drawn an immense crowd by his antics"⁽¹²⁰⁾

Most of the letters end "Yours W. or W.O." or "Your loving W." Among less frequent endings are "Yours Egerton" twice,^(8,13) and once "Your loving Egerton"⁽⁷⁾.

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- Illustration 1. William Osler dressed for the tropics, between Baroudi and Sir Edmund Boyd Osler.

FRIENDS OF THE OSLER LIBRARY a Report and an Appeal

The year which has passed since the last Report to the Friends of the Osler Library was filed has been one which, on the surface, might seem to have been an uneventful one, a mere interim between the end of my tenure as active head of the Library, and the arrival of the new History of Medicine Librarian, June Schachter. Beneath this apparent calm of anticipation, however, much has been going on — much indeed which the Friends of the Osler Library have materially assisted to go on. To begin with, the Library's program of acquisition of new and historic works in the history of medicine never faltered. Normally, these reports concentrate on the rare books purchased through the Friends' funds; this year, by way of a change, I would like to highlight a few outstanding new works. The range of subjects covered by these acquisitions is very striking: from Georgette Legee's biography of Marie Jean Pierre Flourens (1794-1867): *physiologiste et historien des sciences*, through A.I. Sabra's new edition of the *Optics of the medieval Islamic scientist Ibn Al-Haytham*, to a splendid 2-volume album of *Tibetan Medical Paintings*. In the revised collections policy discussed and approved at the meeting of the Library's Board of Curators two years ago, the Library undertook to create a truly comprehensive collection in the history of medicine, throughout the ages and world-wide. It is evident that the support of the Friends of the Osler Library is absolutely essential to the fulfilment of this mandate; as the sample titles listed above indicate, it is already helping towards its accomplishment.

Collections development is a major priority for the Friends, but it is far from the only way in which they help the Library. Last year, for example, Friends' gifts help to purchase custom-made bookcases for the mezzanine of the Library, designed to fit against the inner rail of the mezzanine and to match the existing bookcases exactly. These new bookcases have done much to ease what was rapidly becoming a shelving crisis. Here again, the Friends' generosity was crucial, for the normal capital alterations grants of the University would never have covered such a project, especially in these times of fiscal restraint. The continued publication and distribution of the *Osler Library Newsletter* is also made possible by the Friends, as are countless small, but essential purchases which enhance our services and help to preserve and publicize our collections. With this issue of the *Newsletter*, we are launching our 1993-1994 appeal for donations from our Friends. A recent study of the income of the Osler Library over the past decade has shown that the percentage of our total available funding derived from the annual donations of the Friends has grown from 5% to well over 15% since 1982. To put it another way, we are three times as dependent on your support as we were ten years ago. The Librarian, staff and Curators of the Osler Library have never been more

aware of the multitude of ways in which the Friends sustain our daily life; we thank you for your confidence in our work, and appeal to you to renew your support for 1993-1994.

Faith Wallis

ANOTHER OSLER LIBRARY BOOK "ADOPTED": the First Edition of a Famous Herbal, from the Library of Robert Burton's Brother.

Dr Roger Ghys of Montreal has become the latest friend of the Library to "adopt" a battered book for restoration. The volume he has chosen is by Rembertus Dodoens, and is entitled *Stirpium historiae pemptades sex. Sive libri XXX*. This is the first edition of this famous herbal, printed by Christopher Plantin in Antwerp in 1583; it is number 2475 in the *Bibliotheca Osleriana*.

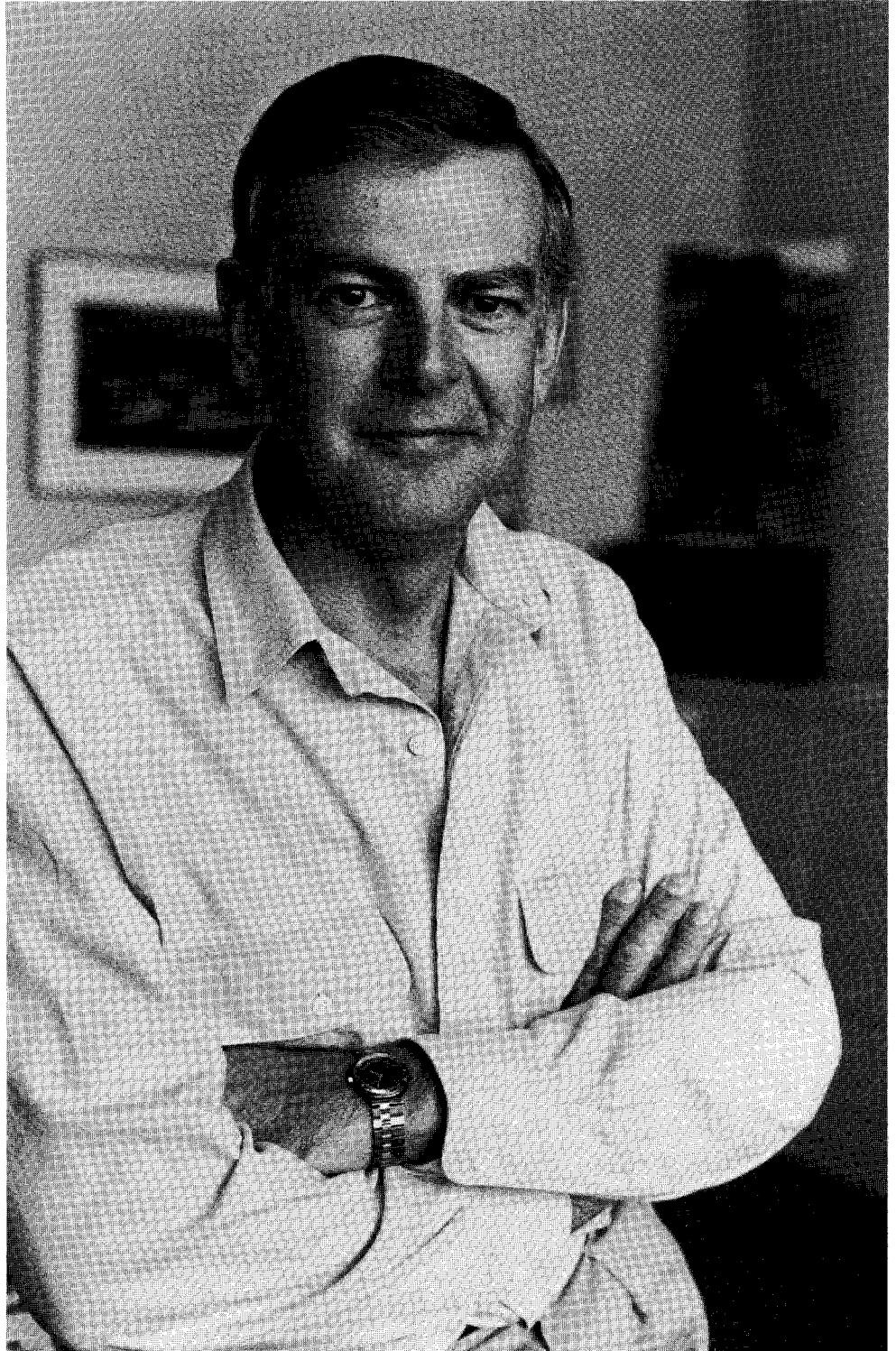
Dodoens (1517-1585) was the first great modern botanist. A native of Malines and graduate of Louvain, he was court physician to several Habsburg rulers, and later professor of medicine at Leiden. This is his magnum opus, and the patriarch of a long line of translations and adaptations, including Gerarde's *Herbal*.

Illustrated with hundreds of delicate and naturalistic woodcuts, it exercised a great influence on botanical iconography as well as on the organization of botanical information. The Library's copy is remarkable for its associations with Robert Burton, author of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, one of Osler's favourite books. It belonged to his brother, William Burton the antiquary and author of *Description of Leicestershire* (B.O. 4638), and later to William's son Cassibelan Burton, both of whom left manuscript notes in the volume.

Osler Day this year is scheduled for Wednesday, November 10, 1993, and as usual, the day promises to be packed with interesting events. In the morning, the Board of Curators of the Osler Library will hold its annual meeting in the Library itself. That afternoon, at 5 p.m., the Osler Lecture will be delivered by Dr. Donald C. Johanson, probably the best known American paleoanthropologist of our day. In 1974, Dr. Johanson discovered a three million year old hominid skeleton, now known as "Lucy", in the Hadar Valley of Ethiopia; this discovery not only propelled Dr. Johanson to fame, but has exercised an extraordinary influence on our understanding of early hominid evolution. The unearthing of "Lucy" was followed a year later by his finding of the "first family", a unique collection of the remains of thirteen individuals who died in a single geological moment.

Dr. Johanson received his graduate training in human paleontology at the University of Chicago under Dr. F. Clark Howell. In 1975, he was appointed curator of physical anthropology at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, and in 1976 developed a world-renowned laboratory of physical anthropology. In 1981, he founded the Institute of Human Origins, in Berkeley, California. Field research has taken him to Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania, where in 1986 he discovered the 1.8 million year old partial skeleton of *Homo habilis*.

Readers of the Newsletter will probably have encountered Dr. Johanson through his popular books *Lucy*, *Lucy's Child*, and *Journey from the Dawn*, or they may have seen one of his numerous television appearances on PBS, or in the National Geographic Society documentaries. On Osler Day, you will have the opportunity to hear him speak in person on the search for our human ancestors. Afterwards, you may wish to attend the annual Osler Banquet, organized by the Medical Students Society, and resplendent with such time-honoured rituals as the passing of the silver Loving Cup and the ceremonial "stoning" of the dining room ceiling with bread-rolls. In the midst of this medical carnival, Dr. Johanson will also respond to questions from the floor about his Osler Lecture. Tickets for the banquet are available through Stella Zoccali at the Department of Social Studies of Medicine, telephone (514) 398-6033.



Dr. Donald Johanson, Osler Lecturer-1993.

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