

OSLER LIBRARY NEWSLETTER

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The Centenary of Osler's *The Principles and Practice of Medicine*



Time is a merciless arbiter that deals dispassionately with the works of men. Among scientific literary works, many bear the dual burden of mediocrity and obsolescence and quickly pass into the forgiving oblivion of disuse and abandonment. For a scientific work, particularly a medical textbook, to be remembered and revered at its centennial is an extraordinary achievement. Such an event, the centenary of William Osler's magnum opus, *The Principles and Practice of Medicine*, occurs at this time.

In 1890, Osler, sensing the need for a new textbook of medicine and encouraged by the overtures of several leading publishers, began work on the textbook. He had accepted the chair of medicine at Johns Hopkins in 1889 and was able to delegate much of his responsibilities at the Hospital to his residents, William S. Thayer and Henri A. Lafleur. In addition, the delay in the opening of the Medical School provided him with additional leisure time for writing. Osler has written candidly of these events:

"On several occasions in Philadelphia, I was asked by Lea Bros. to prepare a work on Diagnosis and had half promised one; indeed I had prepared a couple of chapters, but continually procrastinated on the plea that up to the 40th year a man is fit for better things than text-books. Time went on and as I crossed this date I began to feel that the energy and persistence necessary for the task were lacking. In Sept. 1890 I returned from a four months' trip in Europe, shook myself, and towards the end of the month began a work on Practice. I had nearly finished the chapter on Typhoid Fever when Dr. Granger, Messrs. Appleton's agent, came from New York to ask me to prepare a text-book on medicine. We haggled for a few weeks about terms and finally, selling my brains to the devil, I signed the contract. My intention had been to publish the work myself and have Lippincott or Blakiston (both of whom offered) handle the book, but the bait of a guaranteed circulation of 10,000 copies in two years and fifteen hundred dollars on the date of publication was too glittering and I was hooked."^(1,2)

Osler received the first copy of the book on February 24, 1892, and according to the oft-told story of his unromantic proposal, tossed it into the lap of Grace Revere Gross saying, "There, take the darn thing; now what are you going to do with the man?"^(3,4)

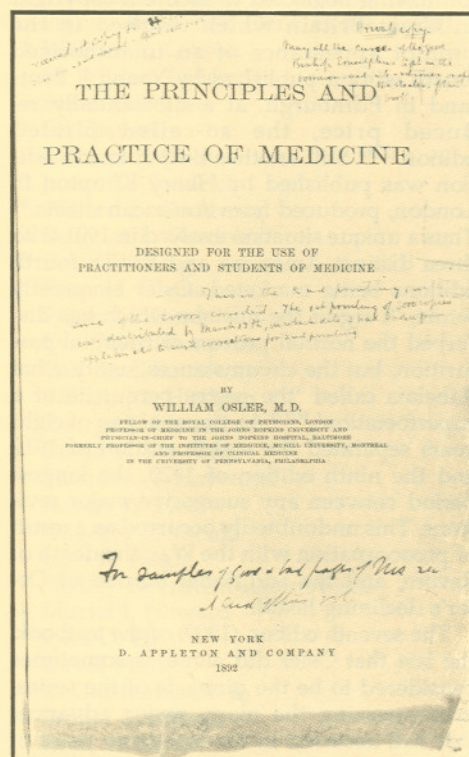
This was the first state of the first edition identified by the misspelled *Georgias* (for *Gorgias*), in the epigraph from Plato on the third leaf. Three thousand copies were issued before the error was corrected in April 1892.^(4,5,6) It is a strange coincidence that the same error was again found in the first issue of the tenth edition in 1925.⁽⁷⁾ In the dedication to be found in each edition of the textbook (excepting the 14th, 15th, and 16th editions), Osler paid tribute to his esteemed teachers, William Arthur Johnson, priest of the parish of Weston and headmaster of Trinity College School; James Bovell of the Toronto School of Medicine; and Robert

of pathology and a disease-oriented approach. It was a wonder of precision and clarity, written with great style and replete with literary and classical allusions. Falconer Madan, the Bodleian librarian, paid tribute to these attributes when he said that Osler "succeeded in making a scientific treatise literature."⁽⁸⁾ The many historical and literary references that are found in the textbook bear witness to Osler's classical erudition and his enthusiasm for the history of medicine. A prime example of this is found in the section on obesity: "An extraordinary phenomenon in excessively fat young persons is an uncontrollable desire to sleep - like the fat boy in *Pickwick*." His delightful Dickensian embellishment caused this clinical phenomenon to be known as the *Pickwickian syndrome*.^(9,10)

Osler's book was the subject of much fond jocularly amongst his students, who sometime irreverently referred to it as "the given word". *The Student's Guide to Osler*, a poem in *Guy's Hospital Gazette* (1909) is a prime example of this; a spoof of Osler's use of many recondite names and references, as found in the sixth edition.^(11,12,13) The poem ends with the following humorous plea:

And now that you are with us at Oxford
You've plenty of Leisure, no doubt,
So make, I petition, another edition,
And leave the Pathology out;
Cut symptoms and treatment, and give us
More tales, repartees, epigrams,
It would leave the whole screed more amusing
to read,
And quite as much use for exams!

The chief criticism of the textbook was its lack of therapeutic direction. Cast as a "therapeutic nihilist" by some critics, and more charitably as a "therapeutic conservative" by others, Osler candidly admitted that medicine had little to offer in the way of curative treatment of most disorders.^(1,14) Osler strongly opposed the systems of homeopathy and polypharmacy that prevailed in his time.^(15,16) Nevertheless, he advocated and used those drugs that he considered rational including nitroglycerine in angina



The title page of Osler's personal interleaved copy of the first edition (second printing) of *The Principles and Practice of Medicine* (B.O. 3544)

Palmer Howard, professor of medicine at McGill. His personal copy of the second state was inscribed, "Private copy. May all the curses of the good bishop Ernulphus light on the borrower-and-not-returner or upon the stealer of this book."⁽⁵⁾

The book was an immediate best seller, and an astonishing 23,500 copies of the first edition were sold in the period from 1892 to 1895, providing Osler with a new-found sense of financial security.⁽⁸⁾ *The Principles and Practice of Medicine* was acclaimed as a "medical masterpiece" and provided up-to-date information derived from a solid base

Dr. Richard L. Golden is the author of the lead article in this issue of the Newsletter. Dr. Golden practices internal medicine on Long Island, and teaches at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. He is a Curator of the Osler Library, and has written numerous articles and books on Osler, including *Osler and Oriental Medicine* and (with Dr. Charles Roland) *Sir William Osler: An Annotated Bibliography with Illustrations*. His "most recent accomplishment" (as they say on the Dewar's advertisements) has been the discovery of two hitherto unnoticed Russian editions of *The Principles and Practice of Medicine*.

pectoris, iron in anaemia and quinine in malaria, among others.⁽¹⁷⁾ He was also a staunch advocate of "G.O.M.," "God's own medicine," as he called morphine.

The *Principles and Practice of Medicine* soon supplanted the entire field of competing medical textbooks. The second edition sold an additional 17,500 copies and by the time of the sixth edition in 1905, 105,000 copies were in print with number 100,000 given to Osler's son, Revere.^(6,8,18) Osler's royalties amounted to \$54,512, equivalent to over \$1,000,000 in current terms.⁽¹⁷⁾ Eventually it is estimated that nearly a half million copies were produced.⁽¹⁹⁾

A truly remarkable event took place in 1905 when Frederick T. Gates, a philanthropic advisor to John T. Rockefeller, read the second edition of the textbook in an effort to acquaint himself with the current state of medicine. Gates wrote of this event: "... I read the whole book without skipping any of it. I speak of this not to commemorate my industry or intelligence, but to testify to Osler's charm, for it is one of the very few scientific books that are possessed of a high literary quality.... I saw clearly from the works of this thoroughly enlightened, able and honest man, perhaps the foremost practitioner in the world, that medicine had - with the few exceptions ... noted - no cures, and that about all medicine up to 1897 could do was to suggest some measure of relief, how to nurse the sick, and to alleviate in some way the suffering."⁽²⁰⁾

Gates communicated these ideas to Rockefeller and initiated a series of events that culminated in the founding of the Rockefeller Institute of Medical Research in 1901.⁽²¹⁾ This, he wrote, "... had its origin in Dr. Osler's perfectly frank disclosure of the very narrow limitations of ascertained truth in medicine as it existed in 1897."⁽²⁰⁾ The creation of the Rockefeller Foundation followed in 1913 and its General Education Board gave \$1,500,000 to Johns Hopkins to fund the establishment of the full-time system at the medical school.⁽²²⁾ The Harvard Medical School was the recipient of \$1,000,000 from the Institute in 1902, a gift ascribed by Gates as originating directly from *The Principles and Practice of Medicine*.⁽²³⁾ The establishment at Johns Hopkins of the School of Hygiene and Public Health in 1918 and the Institute of the History of Medicine in 1929 were further examples of Rockefeller beneficence.⁽²⁴⁾

While the effect of Osler's book on medical philanthropy and research cannot be overestimated, it is in the teaching and practice of generations of students and physicians that its ultimate value is to be found. It became the predominant textbook of medicine in the English speaking world, and beyond through its translations, and went through sixteen editions from 1892 to 1947. The more than one hundred editions, states, printings, variants and translations represent a bibliographic challenge that few today would dare undertake. Cushing wrote that, "Someone, someday, could well write a volume devoted to a study of the successive editions of this famous work which continues to ex-

ert an enormous influence on students of medicine..."⁽⁸⁾

Translations of *The Principles and Practice of Medicine* appeared throughout the world beginning with the Russian edition of 1905-1906. This was followed by the French edition of 1908, and the German edition of 1909. The three Chinese editions spanned the years 1909-1934. Spanish translations appeared in Barcelona in 1915 and in Buenos Aires in 1949. A Portuguese translation was published in Rio de Janeiro in 1945. In addition there were British editions which were for the most part Appleton editions with cancel titles and appropriate bindings.^(6,25) The many translations of the textbook attest to the truly global impact of Osler's textbook.

New editions of the textbook were generally published at three to five year intervals with the exception of the fifth and ninth editions. The fifth edition was published in 1902 just one year after the appearance of the previous edition. This arose from Appleton having neglected to secure a copyright in Great Britain which resulted in the prompt appearance of an unauthorized fourth edition published by Young J. Pentland in Edinburgh, at a substantially reduced price, the so-called pirated edition.^(7,26) Still another British fourth edition was published by Henry Kimpton in London, produced from American sheets.⁽⁶⁾ Thus a unique situation evolved in 1901 with three distinct American and British fourth editions being marketed. Osler eloquently wrote, "I regret the mistake which has disturbed the normal process of triennial parturition, but the circumstances justify what Rabelais called 'the pretty perquisite of a superfoetation'."⁽²⁷⁾ An unusual gap of eight years separated the eighth edition of 1912 and the ninth edition of 1920, the longest period between any successive major revisions. This undoubtedly occurred as a result of preoccupation with the War, the death of Revere, and the additional burden of Osler's declining health.

The seventh edition (1909) of the textbook, the last that Osler did alone, is sometimes considered to be the pinnacle of the series, encompassing the many major advances that had occurred in the seventeen years of publication. Thomas McCrae, Osler's former resident and at that time professor of Medicine at Jefferson Medical College, became co-author in the eighth and the posthumous ninth edition. He carried on as the sole author through the twelfth edition (1935) after which Henry A. Christian of Harvard University assumed the task through the sixteenth and final edition.⁽⁶⁾ When *The Principles and Practice of Medicine* ceased publication in 1947 it had illuminated an extraordinary fifty-five year epoch of medicine. The demise of the textbook no doubt resulted from declining sales, increased popularity of multi-authored textbooks, newer stars such as Cecil, and the imperceptible loss of Osler's input. Osler was not unaware of the possibility of some of these factors when he wrote, "Naturally I have a strong sentiment about the book, but I know

quite well that the life and success of a work depends on the life of a man..." He sought unsuccessfully for many years to transfer editorial control in such a manner as to make the book a Johns Hopkins textbook of medicine.⁽²⁸⁾

It remained for Dr. A. McGehee Harvey and his colleagues to bring fulfillment to Osler's vision of a Johns Hopkins textbook of medicine. In 1968, twenty-one years after the cessation of publication, the seventeenth edition of *The Principles and Practice of Medicine* was published by Appleton-Century-Crofts. This was a new, multi-authored work from the Johns Hopkins faculty, employing a patient-oriented concept and preserving the name and numeration of the original series.⁽²⁹⁾ Quadrennial revisions have been published, the last of which was the twenty-second edition in 1988. Although not a revision of Osler's book, it came from an institution rich in the tradition of Osler and dedicated to the preservation of his principles and ideals, thus retaining the essence of Osler and his *magnum opus*.

At its centennial, Osler's *Principles and Practice of Medicine* commands not only our profound respect and admiration as a medical book of inestimable value to generations of physicians worldwide and as a work whose influence on research and philanthropy is unprecedented, but gives us a greater insight into Osler, the man, as a means of better understanding his erudition, philosophy, humor and ethics, as well as his truly extraordinary humanism. In his own moving words, "Books are the witnesses of the spirit - of the thoughts and hopes and deeds of all sorts and conditions of men."⁽³⁰⁾

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Kircher's Museum Displayed

Historians of art and architecture, of science and medicine, of Baroque culture, Jesuit scholarship, and even of Canadian aboriginal peoples will all find something of interest in an important historic volume recently acquired for the Osler Library. The book in question is the illustrated catalogue of the museum of natural history, antiquities, and ethnographic artifacts assembled by the Jesuit polymath Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680), and housed in the Society's Roman college. Published in Rome in 1709 by Kircher's successor, Filippo Buonanni, the catalogue's full title is *Musaeum Kircherianum sive Musaeum a P. Athanasio Kirchero in Collegio Romano Societatis Jesu iam pridem descriptum nuper restitutum auctum descriptum et iconibus illustratum*. Its 522 folio pages include 172 engraved plates illustrating the contents of this quintessential Baroque *Wunderkammer*.

Athanasius Kircher was one of the best-known figures in the scholarly world of his day, with an enormous, if controversial, reputation as a man of learning. He numbered savants like Fabry de Pieresc and Gassendi among his friends, and was read appreciatively by Leibniz. Most of Kircher's life was passed in the Jesuit College in Rome, where he composed a prodigious number of books on a wide variety of subjects; many of his works are represented in the Osler Library.

Kircher's erudition was not ordered by a logical taxonomy of knowledge or a hierarchy of the sciences; rather, it revolved around certain motifs. One of his major obsessions was *origins*: the origin of the human race (discussed in his treatise on the Ark of Noah), the origin of language (the burden of his *Turris Babel*), the origin of knowledge (for which he felt the records of ancient Egypt and China provided the most significant clues), the subterranean sources of fire and water, and even the origin of the dreaded plague (Kircher was the first to suggest that infectious diseases were caused by "germs"). Another central theme was that of *attraction*: the attraction exercised by the magnet became an analogy for the projection of light and sound, for the operation of the laws of gravity, and even for political



Native costume from New France. An illustration from Buonanni's *Musaeum Kircherianum* ... (1709)

stability. For Kircher, the universe was knit together by a kind of metaphysical magnetism which expressed itself in *correspondences* between the microcosm and the macrocosm, the visible and invisible worlds. This theme lead logically to an interest in *marvels*, phenomena whose causes were obscure but ultimately understandable, like the "germs" of the plague. Men, too, could construct their own marvels in the form of *machines*: Kircher was particularly interested in automata, in "computers", and in devices which could project sound and images.

Kircher took over the collection assembled at the College by Alfonso Donnino, and shaped it along the lines suggested by his distinctive brand of intellectual curiosity. He persuaded his fellow Jesuits who were serving as missionaries in Asia or the Americas to send him artifacts, inscriptions, and pictures. He himself collected Egyptian antiquities and hieroglyphic inscriptions, as well as instruments and machines; indeed the only work about the Museum issued in Kircher's lifetime, *Romani Collegii Societatis Jesu Museum Celeberrimum...*, published in Amsterdam in 1678 (and also to be found in the Osler Library) concentrates exclusive on Egyptology and mechanical devices. But as Buonanni's catalogue reveals, the range of Kircher's museum was far more extensive. It was organized into 12 classes:

1. Cult statues and sacrificial instruments.
2. Ex-votos and amulets.
3. Funerary art and inscriptions.
4. Funerary lamps.
5. Items of ancient craftsmanship.
6. Fossils and other mineral substances "upon which Nature has impressed a distinctive image".
7. Objects of ethnographic or natural interest brought back by travellers.
8. Marine plants and fruits; marine and land

animals (mostly exotic, unusual, deformed or monstrous examples).

9. Machines such as mechanical models for demonstrating principles of physics, hydraulic toys, musical automata, and devices for transmitting sounds and pictures.

10. Paintings, statues and medals.

11. Microscopes and curiosities seen under the microscope.

12. Shells.

Within class 7 are found a number of items sent to Kircher by Jesuit missionaries in New France, including two Huron costumes (one of which is illustrated here), and a beaded belt, for which the following description is provided:

Another belt two inches wide from New France, or the realm of Canada in America. The said Huron people fashioned it with marvellous craftsmanship from minute fragments of the bones of various birds, uniform in size and smaller than the shaft of a goose-feather. First they prepare these fragments by dyeing them different colours. Then they select the ones they want, and string them together with great skill to depict flowers, letters, birds and plants; the specimen in the Museum is made only from black and white bones. I have seen another, half a palm's breadth wide, in which can be read the words of the angelic salutation: "Ave Maria gratia plena"; it was sent as a gift by the faithful Christians of this region to the church of the Blessed Virgin at Loreto. (p. 225)

It is Kircher's influence on the visual imagination of his age which intrigues Professor Alberto Perez-Gomez, director of McGill's graduate programme in architectural theory and history. Professor Perez-Gomez has been using the Osler Library's Kircher collection for his seminar for a number of years, and was very enthusiastic about the acquisition of the Buonanni catalogue. He also teaches a similar seminar at Harvard, whose resources for Kircher studies, he says, are inferior to those of McGill.

No doubt specialists in various fields are bound to find something of relevance in Kircher's museum, but it is really as a collection that its historical significance must be assessed. The Museum was an obligatory item on the itinerary of every gentleman visiting Rome on the Grand Tour, and it attracted scholars and scientists from across Europe; the inventory of its collections is really a conspectus of material resources for learning in the Baroque age.

The Osler Library and the Director of Libraries, who jointly financed the acquisition of this important volume, are delighted to have been able to seize the opportunity of enhancing a collection of such significant interdisciplinary potential. The Library's portion of the purchase price was covered by a generous donation from Dr. John McGovern, a Curator and long-time friend of the Osler Library. We are grateful for the opportunity to thank Dr. McGovern publicly for helping us to acquire this book.

Faith Wallis

Adopt An Osler Library Book: A Progress Report

The response to our appeal, launched in the October 1991 *Newsletter*, to "adopt an Osler Library book" has been very gratifying. As of January 1992, eight battered books have been adopted by friends of the Library, and are well on their way to recuperation. Our thanks go out to:

- Dr. Richard Creuss, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Chairman of the Board of Curators of the Osler Library, who has adopted two volumes: Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* and Andreas Vesalius' *Epistola, rationem modumque propinandi radicis Chynae decocti...*;

- Dr. William Feindel of the Montreal Neurological Institute, who has funded the restoration of Willis' *Cerebri anatome*;

- Mrs Eve Osler Hampson, a Curator of the Osler Library, who adopted Descartes' *Discours de la methode*;

- Dr. H. Rocke Robertson, a Curator of the Library, for taking on Robert Boyle, *Experiments and Considerations Touching Colours*;

- Dr. Charles Roland, Hannah Professor of the History of Medicine at McMaster University, who has befriended Black's *Experiments upon Magnesia Alba...*;

- Dr. Elton D. Kerr of Kingsport, Tennessee, who has come to the rescue of our luminous *Lumen animae*;

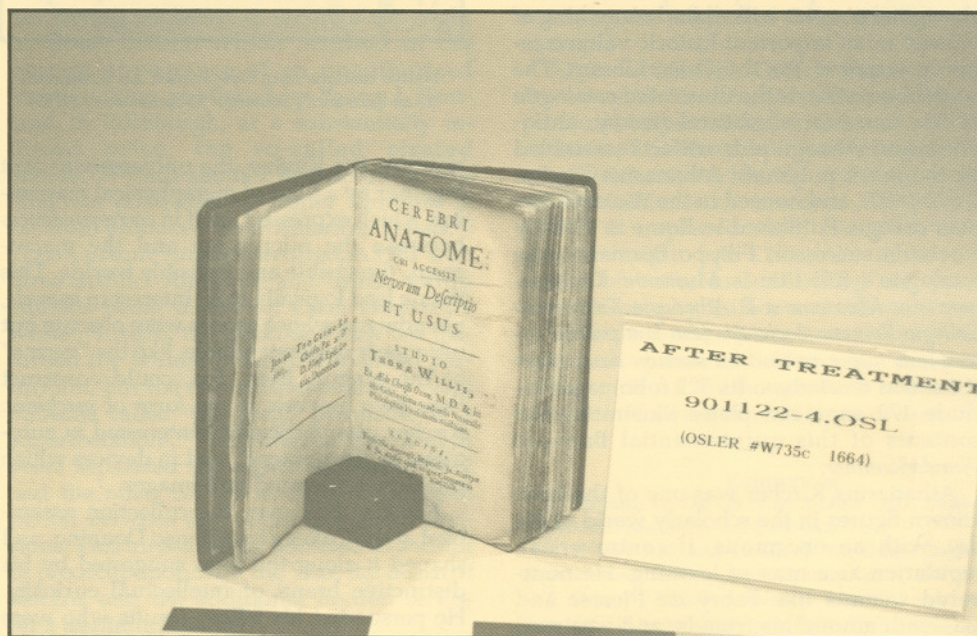
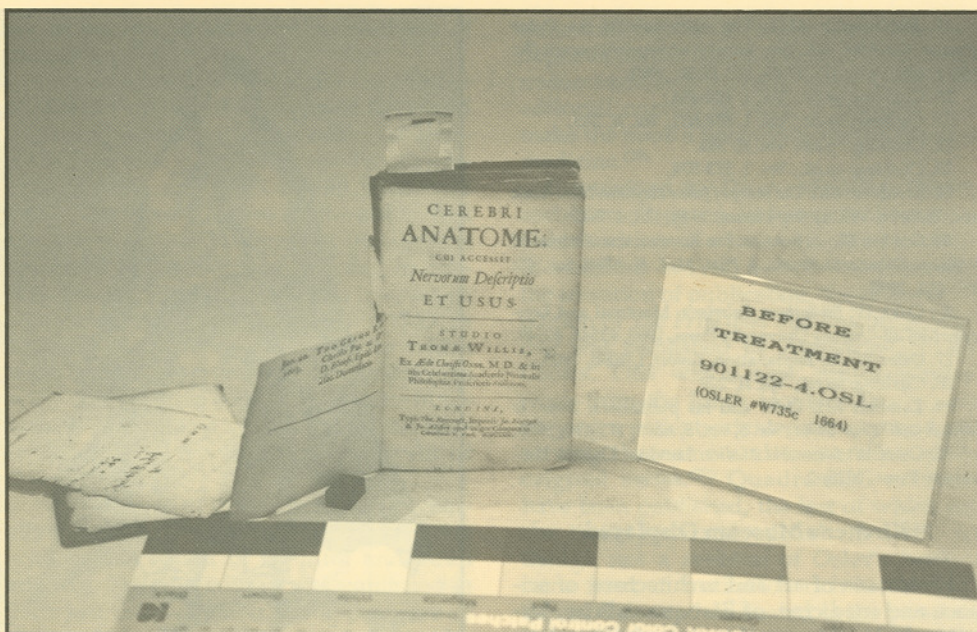
- Mr. Eric de Bellaigue of London England, who has adopted Erasmus' *De recta ... pronuntiatione*.

Some readers of the *Newsletter* have contacted us to express surprise at the high cost of some of the restorations proposed. It seems that many were under the impression that the books require merely routine conservation. This is not the case at all. All fifty books were selected precisely because they need very extensive and costly overhauls, almost always involving washing the book page by page, deacidification etc. The limited space available in the adoption brochure did not permit an extensive description of the condition of each volume, or a breakdown of the costs involved in each procedure. However a detailed look at what is involved in repairing Nathaniel Hodges' *Loimologia* might clarify the situation:

Disbind	\$50
Wash	\$150
Deacidify	\$210
Resize	\$150
Repair tears	\$50
Resew	\$120
Rebind in calf	\$119
Leather label	\$16
TOTAL	\$815
Optional box	\$150
TOTAL	\$965

As this estimate was prepared almost two years ago, we have added 10% to cover inflation, for a total price of \$1062.

A word is perhaps in order about the restorer we have engaged for this work. Mrs Terry Remple-Mroz has many years of experience, first as a paper restorer and lately in book restoration. She teaches conservation



Thomas Willis's *Cerebri anatome* before and after restoration. Photography courtesy of Terry Mroz.

and restoration in the Graduate School of Library and Information Studies at McGill University, and has undertaken numerous restoration projects for academic libraries in this region, including the cleaning and repair of a large number of volumes damaged in a flood in the Rare Books Department of McGill's McLennan Library. Her handiwork is on display in the accompanying illustration, showing Willis' *Cerebri anatome* before and after surgery.

In some cases, it might appear that the cost of restoring the book equals or even exceeds the cost of purchasing another copy. However, it is doubtful that Osler's copy of any of our adoptable books could be acquired for much less than the restoration price. The mandate of the Library is to care for Osler's books and make them accessible: refurbishing these volumes is a homage to the man who collected them as much as to the contents of the books themselves. We are

deeply grateful to the friends of the Library who have agreed to adopt our books, and hope that others will find similar "godparents" in the near future. Copies of the adoption prospectus are available from the Library.

Faith Wallis

The Osler Library Fax Number

The Osler Library now has its own fax. The number is (514) 398-5747.

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