



The Persisting Osler—IV



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Selected Transactions of the
American Osler Society 2001—2010

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*To all who pursue the Oslerian ideals of technical competence,
humane caring, and clinical wisdom in the service of the sick,
and to the memory of Charles G. Roland, M.D. (1933–2009),
first Historian of the American Osler Society
and co-editor of volumes I–III of The Persisting Osler*



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Preface

The Persisting Osler IV is the latest in a decennial series of selected papers delivered at the annual meetings of the American Osler Society. Like its predecessors,¹⁻³ this volume reflects the breadth of interests and scholarship of its members and guest speakers, some of whom have been medical students. Now entering its fifth decade, the Society continues to attract an energetic and expanding mix of clinicians, historians, scholars in the humanities, bibliophiles, librarians, and others interested in the broader contexts of medicine. From these varied backgrounds flows a broad array of topics for presentation and discussion at the meetings, but the common attractant and the continuing integrating force remains an interest in William Osler (1849–1919).

It is fair to ask why, more than 160 years after his birth and some 91 years after his death, Osler continues to draw so much interest and stimulate such a diverse range of scholarship. It may well be that his admirers seek a hero, a figure of admirable dimensions with whom each can identify to some degree. We in North America, perhaps especially in medicine, have not had many heroes—all the more reason Osler stands out. Clearly there is something compelling about the Osler image, the composite of the master clinician, the energizing teacher, the captivating colleague, and the broadly literate scholar in the humanities. Each of these dimensions elicits a desire to emulate, to realize in ourselves elements of Osler's professional and personal character.

It is also fair to ask to what extent the idealized Osler diverges from the man himself. This volume, like its predecessors, reminds us that Osler was less than perfect, especially if we choose to measure him by present-day standards. Although the papers herein are in the main favorable, or at least neutral, toward one or another facet of this multidimensional man, a distinct minority afford glimpses of shortcomings—a sometimes self-conscious effort to depict him as more than just a paper saint.⁴ Osler would, we suspect, smile knowingly. As he once put it: “Not that we all live up to the highest ideals, far from it—we are only men. But we have ideals, which mean much, and they are realizable, which means more.”⁵

In his view, developing a keener awareness of and pursuing those ideals was vital to the physician. Thus, among the most striking features of Osler's presence in North American medicine, and later in the United Kingdom where he was the King's Professor at Oxford, were his insistent, articulate, and often compelling reminders of the rich humanistic traditions of medicine, of the continuing relevance of its ancient commitment to humane service to the sick, shaped by the theories of the time and informed by the extant knowledge base. In effect, he

reminded the profession of its noblest traditions and highest aspirations, and in the process he helped in development of a professional persona in the very many physicians and medical students whose lives he touched. He restated for his own time the Hippocratic ideals of *philanthropia* and *philotechnia*, love of humanity joined with love of the science and art of medical practice.

The 33 papers in the current volume, ranging as they do from short biographical sketches to original investigations, are representative of the 444 papers presented at the annual meetings of the American Osler Society between 2001 and 2010. Likewise, this volume constitutes a limited sample of the Society's published scholarship during its fourth decade. It sponsored or co-sponsored seven additional books and monographs during this time frame, including a project wherein members of the Society combed through nearly all of Osler's writings for memorable passages. This culminated in *The Quotable Osler*, a user-friendly index to Osler's thought.⁶ The Society co-published five monographs with the Osler Library of the History of Medicine at McGill University.⁷⁻¹¹ Finally, the Society brought out an edited volume of the first 18 John P. McGovern Lectures,¹² making these special presentations accessible to a wider audience. These works, the content of the present volume and the separate publications of individual members of the Society represent an ongoing commitment to scholarship in the history of the medical profession and in the humanities as they relate to medicine, with the aim of fostering humanism in medicine, a clearer sense of the continuing evolution of the field, and ultimately, more humane and measured medical care.

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