



referring to was not current works on medical history, but rare books. Why was Francis not continuing to build Osler's collection of old primary works? Malloch brought the matter up again in 1941⁽⁶⁾, specifying that rare books would be a suitable way of investing the annual surplus. In 1942 the subject came up again, and Francis as usual dodged it with a specious rationalization:

It was pointed out that this surplus gave opportunity of spending more on old books. The Librarian explained that orders for several old books had arrived after they were sold, and that he had not yet got the habit of cabling for ordinary desiderata.⁽⁷⁾

This must have left the Curators scratching their heads long enough for Francis to change the subject. Of course, one does not cable ordinary desiderata; one cables orders from catalogues. But was Francis even doing this? His financial report contains a rubric for postage and telegrams, but his acquisition statistics show him buying only between nine and fifteen or so old books each year. Indeed, in dollar figures his book purchases actually declined over the period of his tenure. He persisted in turning back large surpluses. When the ailing Malloch was replaced on the Board by John Fulton, Fulton inherited Malloch's duty of pressuring the reluctant Librarian to buy more books, and with about as much success.

Francis was similarly resistant to the idea of building up the endowment of the Osler Library. At the very first meeting of the Board of Curators in 1929 Dean Martin suggested that a campaign be mounted to build an endowment of about \$50,000. Francis, in a move which no modern librarian can look upon with anything other than appalled disbelief, replied that the current annual income of \$1,900 was more than sufficient for the Library's needs, and that he deprecated any appeal to the Osler family or to Osler's old associates.⁽⁸⁾ Subsequent efforts to galvanize Francis into fundraising met with silent resistance, despite the evident interest of the Osler family in donating to the Library. It was not until the arrival of Lloyd Stevenson and the election of Wilder Penfield to the Curators in the early 1950's that foundation money was actively sought, and a Friends organization planned.⁽⁹⁾ Francis recorded these events without comment in the minutes, save to protest, a few years later, that all this additional income was a terrible burden to him because he could not keep up with the ordering.⁽¹⁰⁾

What are we to make of this curious unwillingness to build the collection? To be sure, Francis had not himself the instincts of a collector, as he freely admitted on numerous occasions. With that, many librarians can sympathize, who are not personally interested in collecting themselves. What they will find harder to comprehend is that Francis could not even conceive of building the Library up for the sake of stimulating study and research in the subjects Osler hoped to promote. This was certainly Malloch's and Martin's vision of what the Library could be, and Malloch tried to bring Francis around to both the endowment campaign and an expanded acquisitions programme by using precisely this logic:

I think [Malloch wrote to Francis] a short statement should be prepared setting forth[h] the present endowment and income, how the money is spent, and what the new \$45,000 or \$50,000 new endowment is for. The Bibl. Osler. should be the centre for the study of the hist[ory] of med[icine] (&

and to all appearance major source of pleasure, was working out historical and linguistic problems posed by other researchers, or in flat parlance of librarians, answering reference inquiries. In Francis' day, the Osler Library was a clearing house and consulting service for every conceivable kind of medical historical and bibliographical information. Many of these inquiries came from afar

and by mail, and Francis' answers were often so detailed, thorough and well-written that they were incorporated into the printed works of the inquirer as appendices or extended notes.⁽¹⁹⁾ Translation was another common task: one of his first projects as Osler Librarian was translating Vesalius' letter to his printer Oporinus, as part of the preparatory work for Malloch's splendid album of Vesalius' illustrations, *Icones anatomicae*⁽²⁰⁾; one of his last was translating the Edinburgh thesis of one of the founders of the Faculty of Medicine, John Stephenson⁽²¹⁾. Closely related to translation was the furnishing of apt quotations and phrases for inscriptions, be they for the new annex to the New York Academy of Medicine, or the Montreal Neurological Hospital. As the world's leading medical philologist, he was also consulted by Penfield and others to assist them in coining legitimate new medical terminology from Greek and Roman roots (centrecephalic, epileptogenic, discoidectomy...)⁽²²⁾. Another avocation was editing the works of others, his major achievement in this line being Harvey Cushing's bibliography of Vesalius, left unfinished at his death in 1939.⁽²³⁾ He also served as *éminence grise* in a number of important bibliographical projects, such as Fulton's bibliography of Fracastoro⁽²⁴⁾, and Keynes' of Harvey⁽²⁵⁾. And if he had no proofs of his own to correct, he scratched his itch for perfection in print by ferreting out typographical errors in other people's books. This particular trait might at first glance seem almost a little offensive; when someone sends your library a copy gratis of their



W.W. Francis (centre) at his last Curators' meeting, April 15, 1959. On the right is the Principal of McGill, F. Cyril James, holding the *Aggregator of Giacomo Dondi*, printed ca. 1470. On the left is the book's donor, W. Fitzhugh.

medical student was dogged by his poor English, but whose talent for historical research Dr. Francis zealously endeavoured to advance. Under Francis' guidance, Etziony wrote an essay on the Hebrew allusions in Vesalius which Francis, with an energy he hardly ever applied to his own efforts, endeavoured for years to get Malloch to accept for inclusion in *Icones Anatomicae*. Etziony eventually did publish on historical and bibliographical subjects, and remained an habitu  of the Library. ⁽²⁹⁾

The arrival of Lloyd Stevenson and the election of Wilder Penfield to the Curators in 1956 marked the beginning of a new and more active era for the Library. Stevenson, brought in by the Faculty as Assistant Osler Librarian and evident heir-apparent, took over the teaching of medical history (though he tactfully left the biographical lecture on Osler to Francis). Elected Dean, and hence Chair of the Curators a few years later, Stevenson spearheaded with Penfield a whole series of new initiatives, including the negotiation of the Wellcome Trust endowment (which to this day pays for most acquisitions of current works) and the inauguration of the Osler Lectureship. If Francis was saddened by the decline of his own powers, he was also reassured by the University's decision in 1943, when he turned 65, that he should remain in office as long as he was competent. He was treated with tender reverence by the new generation of Curators, and C cile Desbarats took care of business, so that he had the satisfaction of dying in harness on August 10, 1959.

A few years later, Miss Desbarats, who somewhat after the manner of Lady Osler, kept open house long after the master had gone, wrote to a former McGill student, Dr. Edmund Simpson (MDCM 1936):

Yes, you are perfectly right, somebody should write a biography of Dr. Francis, well-peppered with his own epistles. I don't think he ever realized what a great influence he exerted over so many - students and doctors alike. He was often reproached for not having written mighty tomes of erudition himself, but nobody will ever know how much of his time was spent helping others, who picked his brain, and claimed his brain-children as their own! Nevertheless, I think he did more in his own quiet way for the history of medicine - and mankind in general - than the many prolific writers whose articles appear in our slightly stuffy journals. He was perfectly contented just to be at his desk, at the beck and call of whoever

dropped into the library, perpetuating the Osler tradition which was so close to his heart.

Who could handle this job is another matter. Perhaps in a few years' time, one of the students who came under his spell, may attempt such a thing. Like Osler, his warm and magical personality would be hard to put down in black and white, and perhaps he might prefer to live on in the thousands of notes tucked away in this library which we bless every day or by the letters which are treasured all over the world. ⁽³⁰⁾

All that William Willoughby Francis did and wrote and said defies summary treatment, and it is extraordinarily difficult to know where and how to end this portrait of the scholar and showman of the Osler Library. There is so much more that deserves discussion: his correspondence with the great medical historians and bibliographers of his day - Cushing and Fulton, Malloch, Keynes and Klebs - would make a meaty essay in itself, and the history of the Osler Society merits a whole book. His delightful patter could be excerpted for hours, and his ordinary correspondence is a bottomless store of minutiae on medical history and bibliography, laced with shameless gossip. But were Francis here today, he would doubtless prefer to ring down the curtain with a laugh, and one at his own expense. My epilogue, then, is Dr. E.H. Bensley's reminiscence of how Francis' humour could parody even his own preoccupation with Osler, and his renowned tendency to bring Osler into every conversation:

Never happier than when he was making fun of himself, [Francis] knew what his friends expected and he did not disappoint them... On February 6, 1956, the Osler Society was holding one of its regular meetings. Dr. Harry Ballou was the Honorary President and that evening he was the speaker. His subject was "Sir James Hector, the Hannibal of the Rockies". At the conclusion of his presentation, all heads turned towards Dr. Francis. As usual, he was sitting in the big leather armchair reserved for him and, as usual, he was asked to open the discussion. I can remember wondering idly how he would go about establishing a connection between Sir James Hector and Osler. I soon found out. Dr. Francis gave his characteristic chuckle and

tin of the Medical Library Association 25 (1936): 58-63. (Francis' Presidential Address to the Association.)

"Sir William Osler and his Library." D.C. Libraries 8 (1937): 25-38.

"'Apologia' from an Unfinished Bibliography of Vesalius by the late Harvey Cushing with an Introductory Note by W.W. Francis." Bulletin of the History of Medicine 8 (1940): 381-391.

"Notes on Plate V, by W.W. Francis." In W. Carl Rufus, "Copernicus, Polish Astronomer, 1473-1543.

**A TRIBUTE To DR. EDWARD HORTON BENSLEY
1906-1995**

**Osler Day, November 1, 1995
Osler Library
3:00 p.m.**

A word of welcome

Dr. Abraham Fuks, Dean, Faculty of Medicine

Five personal perspectives on Edward Bensley

Dr. Roy Forsey

Dr. Bensley always regarded himself; first and foremost, as an M.G.H. man. Dr. Forsey, a close colleague of Dr. Bensley's at the Montreal General, evokes his presence in this, his favourite milieu.

Dr. Stanley B. Frost, Director, History of McGill Project.

Dr Frost and Dr Bensley shared a deep interest in the history of McGill and its environment. They collaborated closely in the launching of the James McGill Society.

Dr. Don G. Bates, Dept. of Social Studies of Medicine.

Following his official "retirement", Dr Bensley launched a second career in the Department of Social Studies of Medicine. His years there are recalled by a fellow-historian, Don Bates.

Miss Marilyn Fransiszyn, Instructional Services Librarian, Humanities and Social Sciences Library.

Marilyn Fransiszyn was for many years Assistant History of Medicine Librarian at the Osler Library. Her work brought her into daily contact with Dr Bensley, whose devotion to this Library and its interests took many forms.

Dr. Bernard Brais, Montreal General Hospital.

As a medical student, Bernard Brais was President of the



Dr. E.H. Bensley, 1906-1995

Funds donated by the Friends of the Osler Library enabled us to render a fitting tribute to a dear friend who is greatly missed by all who had the privilege of knowing and working with him. On Osler

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