

This volume is published in commemoration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of Osler's death, December 29, 1919.

Foreword

ON APRIL 1913 Sir William Osler delivered the Silliman Lecture to the undergraduates of Yale University and urged them to "live in day-tight compartments." He had spent a month making notes for this lecture, most of which was written on the steamer enroute to America, and the remainder, as Cushing reports in his *The Life of Sir William Osler*, was hand-written the day before delivery, in the Graduate's Club at New Haven.

"The load of to-morrow, added to that of yesterday, carried to-day makes the strongest falter," Osler told the students. He bade them banish the ghosts of the past, shut their minds to the spectre of the future, and get on with the day's work. His theme, sounded again and again, referred to the Aristotelian concept of life as a

habit, and habit as the gradual acquisition of power by long practice; he entreated his audience to establish the habit of living for the day, thereby gaining mastery over body and mind.

The idea is not novel, but Osler brought a new enthusiasm and his considerable powers of persuasiveness to its advocacy. His words are simple, direct and compelling. His very simplicity of approach could be dangerous if it induces the reader to glide too easily over his words. They are words that deserve to be studied, meditated upon, returned to again and again, for the goal of living for the day has a telling relevance in our time.

Ours is a world that has multiplied in complexity beyond anything dreamed in Osler's day. Tension and anxiety, uncertainty and stress are the inevitable result of

our civilization's rapid advance, mental and emotional ills its hallmarks. With the spectre of total annihilation hanging over him, contemporary man desperately needs to learn the lesson of "sufficient unto the day. . . ."

A Way of Life offers an antidote in the form of a life style. But is the goal attainable? Osler's own life, marked by brilliant achievement in many spheres, testifies to the efficacy of sound habits of work and discipline established early and followed strictly. Can others follow his example?

I believe they can. My long-time friend and teacher, Wilburt C. Davison, organizer of the Duke Medical School, vivifies the Oslerian "way." We were discussing this very essay last winter and Dean Davison, a Rhodes scholar under Osler and his staunch admirer, raised

doubts that living in "day-tight compartments" was possible. The irony is that Dean Davison might fail to see what others see—that he himself has learned to "live for the day," for the fleeting moment, in Osler's sense. He does it better than anyone else I know. I mention this anecdote simply to underscore the fact that Osler's admonition, the task he holds out to us, seems enormously difficult; yet most of us can achieve some measure of it and the best of us can master it.

An unidentified commentator on Osler's essay remarked that "the medical profession might well be proud of a leader who could, without affectation, preach a lay sermon which an archbishop might not be ashamed to have written."

Unlike some sermons, this one stimulates. Unlike most, it has survived for half

a century and may well endure for centuries more. It speaks to all of us, whatever our age or sex or field of endeavor. We who honor Osler's memory can have no greater wish for the reader than that which Osler himself expressed at the conclusion of *A Way of Life*: "Perhaps this slight word of mine may help some of you so to number your days that you may apply your hearts unto wisdom."

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