

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

WILLIAM OSLER'S BOYHOOD TOWN

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Wembley

In the blazing heat of a Canadian summer, rather sleepy eyed and unbreakfasted, I climbed down the enormous carriage steps of a great Canadian Pacific train.

I was in Toronto at last, after a busy week touring Montreal, Quebec, and surrounding areas during which I was able to visit a number of general practitioners in their places of work. However, I was feeling curiously at home and comfortable despite several nights of train travel and lack of sleep.

From American film experience, it's likely that you will be familiar with the smiling presence of the coloured attendant who handed my cases down. A few days before, I had purchased a light Dacron suit and despite the very high temperature, I was enjoying the weather.

Very soon, I remounted those now familiar carriage steps *en route* for Dundas, a small town near Hamilton, Ontario. Good fortune vied with the sun for I stepped straight into a breakfast car of a Hamilton bound train and my table companion happened to be an English relative of a medical acquaintance at home. This intelligence was established within seconds.

North American trains seem to travel slowly but this is because there are fewer joints on the lines and, without the familiar "diddly dump" and less noise, you get the impression of rather leisurely travel but still you seem to arrive at your destination in good time.

I had had some thoughts about the late William Osler for I was lucky enough to visit the Osler Memorial Library at McGill University, Montreal on the previous day. It is beautifully cared for and well worth a visit. I received a good welcome, but was very sorry to miss a meeting there with Dr W. W. Francis, the celebrated nephew, since deceased, of William Osler.

By chance, I had just been visiting the house of his daughter, a lively Canadian doctor and mother of six children, working at the Ormstown Centre, outside Montreal, an excellent example of a

group practice with a small local hospital built adjacent to the centre.

I chanced to visit Dundas as part of a modest self-arranged Canadian tour of a general practitioner. It was arranged by the Canadian College of General Practitioners that I should visit a certain doctor in that town.

I met up with my opposite number on a quick round of his hospital patients. We then returned to the small town of Dundas which is on the way out to Niagara Falls. This is the town to which Canon Featherstone Osler and his nine children had gone to live in 1857.

Of Cornish origin, the family had lived happily in Bond Head, Tecumseth, Upper Canada, but they were reluctantly compelled to move for educational reasons to the less remote living of Dundas, Ontario, a growing area at the end of Lake Ontario. But for delay caused by an attack of croup, which young Willie Osler is said to have developed, the whole family might have perished in the Desjardins Viaduct disaster of March 12th, 1857.

Soon after arriving and learning of Dundas' Oslerian associations, armed with cine camera and tape recorder, I went into the small church in which Canon Osler had officiated. Standing in the pulpit, I was able to look round at tablets on the walls, placed in memory of various members of the Osler family. I recorded on my tape a description of the interior of this picturesque little Anglican church. We went outside, passing and photographing the memorial to William Osler erected by the Hamilton Academy of Medicine.

A short way down the road was an attractive house which we entered, I recall, without even knocking on the door. They seemed to do this kind of thing in this town, but we were, nevertheless, cordially received by the lady of the house who told us that it was a memorial home for ladies, started by Ellen Osler, William Osler's mother who died in her 101st year.

In this happy, free, and easy spirit, we then wandered into a beautiful house with colourful gardens. This was, in fact, the home of Canon Osler and his family. It presented a relatively new and very clean appearance, perhaps because the colouring of North American houses is usually more vivid than we are used to here. It might have been mistaken for one of the more substantial houses around outer London built just before the second world war.

Other places visited were the Dundas town hall, the late Dr Thomas Bertram's surgery or office where Osler probably did his first locum job.

To crown the thrill of a close encounter with these Oslerian shrines, I cannot resist describing the sight of Niagara Falls on that

afternoon as we drove further along the road to the United States border. There was a rainbow festooning the enormous cloud of spray which threw up a welcome drenching on this bright and sunny afternoon. Away below, a small motor launch was cruising right under the polychromatic mist, the occupants vividly contrasting in their yellow oilskins.

Back in Toronto that night, I resolved to study Osler with more diligence. Why is it that the Americans, Canadians, and British hold the memory of this man in such great esteem and affection?

On closer study, it became clear that here was a man with great knowledge and ability, but above all, with a superabundance of personal kindness, enthusiasm, loyalty and charm. There is ample evidence that if one, such as I, an undistinguished practitioner from England, had called on Osler himself, he would have been made to feel utterly welcome and an honoured guest, for it is said that his house at Oxford was constantly filled with, above all, young people who were always most welcome and received much encouragement.

The worship of the name of William Osler is simply the worship of what is best in medicine. This man combined the warmth of humanity with a spirit of enquiry and scientific endeavour. His name is on the lips of many Canadians who otherwise know very little of medicine; but far and wide, they speak of him as others would speak of a much loved local practitioner now deceased.

MIDLAND FACULTY—DIABETES SYMPOSIUM

Saturday 3 November 1962

To be held at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham

2 p.m.	Opening remarks by Chairman	H. N. LEVITT
2.5 p.m.	Recent Advances in Diabetes	J. M. MALINS
2.30 p.m.	Significance of Glycosuria	M. G. FITZGERALD
2.55 p.m.	Diabetes Survey Methods	L. A. PIKE
3.20 p.m.	DISCUSSION	
4.15 p.m.	Diabetes and the General Public	J. J. A. REID
4.35 p.m.	The Place of the Hospital in the Care of Diabetes	A. PAYTON
4.55 p.m.	The Place of the General Practitioner in the Care of Diabetes	R. J. F. H. PINSENT
5.15 p.m.	DISCUSSION	
5.45 p.m.	Chairman's remarks	

Those wishing to attend this symposium should apply to Dr J. Beaton Hird, 97 Hillmeads Road, King's Norton, Birmingham 30.