William Osler
The Complete Physician

Born in 1849, in the hamlet of Bond Head, near Toronto. His father, having tried the Navy, became instead an Anglican minister.

William Osler was the 4th of 9 children
Baptized the same day in 1849 as one William Banting.
1857, the family moved to Dundas, a larger community.

W.O.’s childhood was religious and happy (and full of pranks).

Age 16, attended new Trinity College School in Weston. Did well in studies and athletics.

W.O. opted for the Church as a career, influenced by his father, and by the Trinity School’s founder and warden Rev. William Arthur Johnson.
Johnson loved “natural history” and he had a microscope!

He was also mentored by James Bovell, M.D., who taught at Trinity College and Toronto School of Medicine and was also interested in Natural History.

1867, age 18, W. O. entered the University of Trinity College in Toronto preparing for the ministry (but he disliked the courses).

Read Lyell’s Principles of Geology SCIENCE AND CHRISTIANITY? vs SCIENCE OR CHRISTIANITY?
W.O. went to medical school – 1868 – at
The Toronto School of Medicine
The Toronto General Hospital

The science of medicine was flourishing:
clinical observation and deduction
autopsy confirmation
stethoscope and thermometer
communicability of diseases
aseptic surgery
the cellular theory of biology
general anesthesia

When Bovell left Toronto,
W.O. transferred to the McGill
Faculty of Medicine in Montreal

W.O. came under the influence
of Dr. Palmer Howard, through
his course, “The Practice of Medicine”
-- shows the value of mentors.
His graduation thesis, based on 20 postmortems, with histology slides, won a special prize.

In 1872 he went to Europe:

England, Germany, Austria

For 2 years he studied with the leaders in the new science of medicine.
1874, returned to McGill as lecturer in
“The Institutes of Medicine” (physiology)
a lecture a day
a steep learning curve

Private practice was a necessity
W. O. specialized in smallpox
and got a “light case” himself.

Became faculty registrar
a genius at personal relations
(Today we would say he had “charisma”)

Visited Harvard and the MGH
Kept regular work and leisure hours
His faith became less prominent
Became attending physician at
“the other MGH.”
scholarly, socially popular, peripatetic
1884 – to Germany
the bacteriological revolution
research, the lab, the clinic

In 1884 he moved to Penn.
Penn, the oldest medical school
The Pennsylvania Hospital – the oldest...
Dr. Benjamin Rush – the most famous

W.O. selected as Professor
of Theory & Practice of Medicine
at Penn’s new campus, 1884
duties were clinical lectures
and ward rounds.
The Philadelphia Hospital (“Blockley”)

W.O. was courted by the new Johns Hopkins
And accepted the Chair of Medicine in 1888.
(BUT THE SCHOOL DIDN’T EXIST!)
W.O.’s last official function at Penn was his address to the graduating class AEQUANIMITAS

Imperturbability – coolness and presence of mind. Calmness of bodily demeanor, clearness of judgment, impassiveness. Mentally, cultivate aequanimitas; don’t expect too much of humankind, be prepared for uncertainty, if not surprises; be gentle. Rich in cliches as well as warmth. A little pompous, and a lot Victorian.

May 7, 1889, W.O. attended the opening of the Johns Hopkins Hospital

THE JOHNS HOPKINS HOSPITAL
John Shaw Billings, M.D. (Ohio)
  Served in Civil War (North)
  Librarian of the Surgeon General’s library
  Index Medicus
  Professor at Penn
  Designed Johns Hopkins Hospital
  Formed NY Public Library
  Inspired Andrew Carnegie’s libraries

The Hopkins faculty was being assembled
Osler was Physician-in-Chief, JHH
  Professor of the Theory and Practice of Medicine, JHU

Proposed to Grace L. Revere Gross,
  Widow of the younger surgeon, Samuel W. Gross
  37, childless
JHH grows

Surgery – William S. Halsted
Ob/Gyn – Howard A. Kelly
Pathology – William Welch
The Principles and Practice of Medicine
Published 1892
Dedicated to his 3 teachers
  Arthur Johnson
  James Bovell
  Palmer Howard

A book of diseases and how to treat them, 1050 pages
Osler emphasized:
  The self-limiting nature of many illnesses
  The benefits of opiates
  Bleeding (!) – now and then
  Acupuncture for lumbago

The new JHU Medical School
Opened in the Fall, 1893
  Eighteen students
  (3 women)!
William Welch, Dean
Small faculty – research a priority
Halsted still a problem

W.O. – the popular clinician
In the clinic, on the ward.
History, physical exam,
Some clinical responsibility for students.
Always, there was W.O.’s personal magnetism for patients & students

JHMS graduated its first class
in 1897. There were 2 women
The “Hen Medics” were controversial

That year, 1897, a brilliant woman student,
graduate of Radcliffe College, entered JHMS.
She, too, was controversial. She did well in
the preclinical two years but more and more poorly in her clinical courses.
W.O. moved that she not graduate in 1901, and she never returned to medicine.
Gertrude Stein
Florence Sabin (born in Central City) was, in 1900, the first woman to graduate from JHMS. Also
The first woman intern
The first woman full professor

Enrollment grew at JHMS to 50-60
Osler’s method looked casual, but was not.
**HE BROUGHT STUDENTS OUT OF THE LECTURE HALLS AND INTO THE HOSPITAL WARDS.**

Another child was born, Revere Osler.
W.O. and Grace lived comfortably without a carriage or telephone.
They entertained all the time (when W.O. was not reading, writing or traveling).

W.O. was busy with his textbook, revising it for new up-to-date editions.
(Over 100,000 were sold)
He wrote papers on medical history, especially for the JH Medical History Club
  Physic and Physicians in Plato
  John Keats, the Apothecary Poet

He began to collect first editions of Medical classics, e.g. Vesalius, Harvey, Locke, etc.

The Oslers were settling in, but . . .
  “he never felt totally at home in the U.S.
  He always intended to retire back to British soil.”
  Their holidays in England became longer.
  He was particularly smitten with Oxford.

Osler’s influence was widespread
He had a religious cast of mind,
but was non-observant
more a Platonist than a Christian

1904 – Harvard gave W.O. an honorary degree
(Oxford did the same)
Oxford offered him the Regius Professorship in
Medicine in 1905
He accepted

1905 W.O.’s farewell to JH speech
included a paean to change
also the comparative uselessness
of men after 40
the definite uselessness after 60
(W.O. was 56)

Oxford – the Oslers live “in town”
W.O. has working rooms in Christ Church College
he fancied John Locke and
Robert Burton had lived in them
they entertain continuously at the “Open Arms”
His clinical duties were light –
gave exams, conducted clinics
served on committees, councils, boards, etc.
He wanted to help Oxford change
strengthen scientific research
phase out compulsory Greek
provide pensions for professors
grant degrees to women

1906 The Harveian Oration
founded by Harvey himself, 1651
W.O. recounted Harvey’s own breakthrough
concerning the circulation of the blood
and its chilly reception!

Publications included:
Hereditary Telangiectasia
Spleenic polycythemia
Stokes-Adams syndrome
SBE with “Osler’s nodes”

Osler was knighted in 1911
Refused offers right and left
Traveled to France & Italy
He looked ahead. In 1909 he said “as our knowledge of the pancreatic function and carbo-hydrate metabolism becomes more accurate we shall probably be able to place the treatment of diabetes on a sure foundation.”

He warned us. “Far too large a section of the treatment of disease is to-day controlled by the big manufacturing pharmacists, who have enslaved us in a plausible pseudo-science.”

1913 The Silliman Lectures at Yale, made into The Evolution of Modern Medicine

“The Evolution” is not a detailed scholarly account of the history of medicine but a grand panorama by a skillful humanist of the progress of our science.
1914 WWI begins.
W.O. greatly troubled
Son, Revere, became 18, eventually joined the artillery.
W.O. consults, advises, advocates typhoid immunization.

1917, August, near Ypres, Revere is severely wounded by shrapnel
operated on by Harvey Cushing
but dies postoperatively
the Oslers are devastated

Harvey Cushing, of a medical family
Yale, Harvard M.S., MGH housestaff
Came to JH to work with Halsted
became an Oslerian, moved next door.
The Oslers “took on” the children and grandchildren of their friends and relatives. They entertained soldiers and Canadians and Americans, and endured the 1918 influenza.

W.O. carried on – consultations, case reports, travels, speeches. He refused to stand for Parliament but was elected to England’s most exclusive dining group, “The Club”, founded by Dr. Johnson and Sir Joshua Reynolds.

He worked hard on the cataloguing of his library.

Soon after his 70th birthday, Osler developed pneumonia with empyema, perhaps after influenza. He had a prolonged course, with thoracentesis (but no x-ray) and died on December 28, 1919.
The service was over.

“So they – the living – left him overnight; alone in the Lady Chapel ... with the quaint effigy of his beloved Robert Burton near by – lying in the scarlet gown of Oxford, his bier covered with a plain velvet pall on which lay a single sheaf of lilies.”
The End