Selected Articles and Letters of Stewart R. Roberts, MD (1878-1941)

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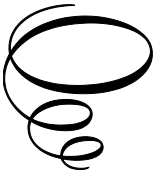
The Osler of the South

Edited with an Introduction by

Charles Stewart Roberts

Cambridge Scholars Publishing



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Stewart R. Roberts, MD (1878-1941)

I am enclosing a letter which I received from my friend, Dr. Stewart Roberts, Professor of Medicine in Emory University, Atlanta. I may add that Dr. Roberts is one of the ablest men in American medicine and is frequently called the "Osler of the South."
—Seale Harris, MD, of Birmingham, Alabama
Editor, *Southern Medical Journal* (1910-1921)
President, Southern Medical Association (1922-3)
From letter to Richard Foster (President, University of Alabama), March 22, 1940

We need to cement through his memory all English-speaking medicine.... I know he has always been the wise friend of my clinical life, the unseen consultant with my patients, the Abou Ben Adhem of my spirit.
—Stewart R. Roberts, MD, of Atlanta, Georgia
From "William Osler, Clinician-Teacher"
Oration on Medicine, Southern Medical Association,
Washington, DC, November 12, 1923

ABOU BEN ADHEM
By Leigh Hunt

Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!)
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,
And saw, within the moonlight of his room,
Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom,
An angel writing in a book of gold:—
Exceeding peace had make Ben Adhem bold,
And to the presence in the room he said,
"What writest thou?" — The vision raised its head,
And with a look made of all sweet accord,
Answered, "The names of those who love the Lord."
"And mine is one?" said Abou. "Nay, not so,"
Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,
But cheerly still; and said, I pray thee, then,
Write me as one that loves his fellow men."

The angel wrote, and vanished. The next night
It came again and with a great wakening light,
And showed the names whom love of God had blest,
And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest.

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WHENEVER and wherever my work, by day or night, in peace or war, on land or sea, in laboratory or office, home or hospital, class room or open field, may I be patient, poised and thorough; loyal to science and to men, unselfish in labor and pure in life. May I hold that science is better than gold and men than greed, that service is proportionate to preparation, and reward to labor. May I use drugs only when indicated, diagnose before I treat or operate, clean before I deliver, use my laboratory, preserve a sense of proportion, respect but not worship my own opinion, seek consultation often, be slow to judgment and cautious in word and deed, and mingle in mind and touch with medical men. In the laboratory may I keep my records, in clinical cases my histories, and between them and me preserve the accuracy of truth. May I be strong with the weak, righteous with the wicked, wise with the foolish, honest with myself and kind to all men. May I avoid professional comparisons and sensitiveness, speak well of those of the household of medical faith, shun jealousy and eschew envy, follow progress, beware lest the demands of life chill my enthusiasm for study and knowledge, play sometimes and wander when I may. May I take injustice gracefully, disappointment easily, fight disease cheerfully, death hopefully, believe victory and defeat equally a part of the larger plan, and rise from both fresh for repeated conflicts. May I remember that I am heir to the same diseases as my patients, must meet the same death, pass with them beyond the River, and may I go with a smile.

ATLANTA
JANUARY 1916

STEWART R. ROBERTS

STEWART R. ROBERTS, MD, AND THE SOUTH

> *Ever since the War between the States, the South [13 States] has been the poorest section of the nation. The richest State in the South ranks lower in per capita income than the poorest State outside the region…The low-income belt of the South is a belt of sickness, misery, and unnecessary death. Its large population of low-income citizens are more subject to disease than people of any similar area.* —Report on the Economic Condition of the South Prepared for the President [Roosevelt] by the National Emergency Council, 1938

Between Appomattox (1865) and Pearl Harbor (1941), the South remained a distinct region of the United States of America, unique in its demography, culture, economy, and health (Figure 1.) After World War II, the South blended with the rest of the USA, but not before. Within this period of time (76 years) and within this distinct region of the world, Stewart R. Roberts, MD (1878-1941), hereafter SRR, lived and rose to a notable level of medical achievement.

This book comes 28 years after this writer published a slim book on SRR, combining a brief biographical sketch with a selection of quotations gathered from his many published addresses. After an initial sense of satisfaction, the writer began to consider the book inadequate. The chief legacy of SRR, if any, lay in his published articles, none of which were included in the first book. The reprints and photocopies of his articles remained on a shelf, collected carefully in 2 leather-bound volumes 50 years ago by the second son of SRR, William C. Roberts, MD, the father of this writer.

Most of the published articles, about 100 in all, were addresses to medical groups that were subsequently published. The purpose of the present book is to let his own writings tell the story. The task began when a box of his personal letters came into the writer's

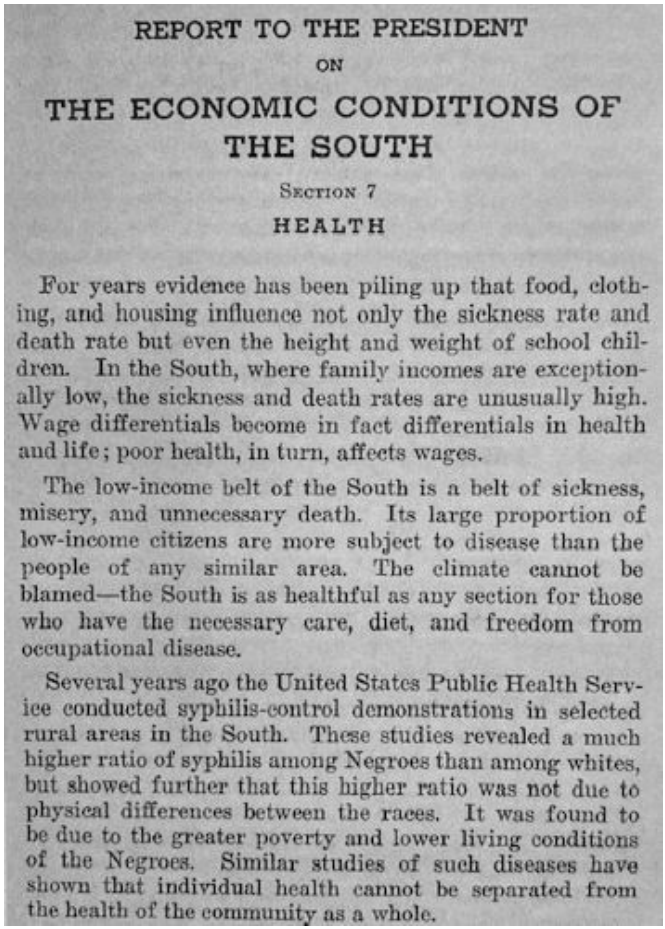
hands a year ago, providing greater insight into SRR, and adding a selection of letters to the collection of articles.

The decision to add Osler to the title was not taken lightly. SRR and Osler shall be compared, followed by some thoughts on the life, articles, letters, and legacy of SRR.

The Comparison

Sir William Osler was considered to be the most important physician in the world of his generation. Born in Canada in 1849, Osler earned his medical degree and took his postgraduate hospital training at McGill University in Montreal. His career had 4 geographic phases—Montreal for first 10 years, Philadelphia for 5, Baltimore for 12, and Oxford for the final 12. Osler is best known for his single-authored textbook of medicine published in 1878, in which his therapeutic recommendations are limited strictly to those proven by evidence, effectively discarding a vast array of sham remedies. Osler's individual publications are staggering in number, however, with no single major medical discovery is he solely credited.

As the first chair of medicine at Hopkins, Osler was one of the "Big Four," together with Halsted in surgery, Welch in pathology, and Kelly in obstetrics and gynecology. At Oxford University, Osler was the Regius Professor of Medicine, the highest academic title. As a physician, he was a master clinician whose consultation was widely sought, a prolific author whose publications number some 2000, a teacher of numerous students and trainees who remained devoted to him, a medical historian and bibliophile whose historical writings were not only scholarly but beautifully written, a leader of medical societies who regularly attended meetings at home and abroad, a seasoned correspondent to many in medicine, young and old, and a warm and devoted friend to many, inside and outside of medicine, who loved him dearly in return.



REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT

ON

THE ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF THE SOUTH

SECTION 7

HEALTH

For years evidence has been piling up that food, clothing, and housing influence not only the sickness rate and death rate but even the height and weight of school children. In the South, where family incomes are exceptionally low, the sickness and death rates are unusually high. Wage differentials become in fact differentials in health and life; poor health, in turn, affects wages.

The low-income belt of the South is a belt of sickness, misery, and unnecessary death. Its large proportion of low-income citizens are more subject to disease than the people of any similar area. The climate cannot be blamed—the South is as healthful as any section for those who have the necessary care, diet, and freedom from occupational disease.

Several years ago the United States Public Health Service conducted syphilis-control demonstrations in selected rural areas in the South. These studies revealed a much higher ratio of syphilis among Negroes than among whites, but showed further that this higher ratio was not due to physical differences between the races. It was found to be due to the greater poverty and lower living conditions of the Negroes. Similar studies of such diseases have shown that individual health cannot be separated from the health of the community as a whole.

Figure 1. From the 1938 report to President Roosevelt

Osler is not a person to whom one advances a comparison lightly. SRR and Osler never met. Osler (1849-1919) was a generation younger than SRR (1878-1941). During the time frame of the medical career of SRR (1902-1941), they lived and worked in different regions of North American (Baltimore and Atlanta) for 10 of those years (1902-1912) and on opposite sides of the Atlantic (Oxford and Atlanta) for 6 years (1912-1919). When SRR went to Europe in 1911 to prepare for his book on pellagra, Osler had not

come yet to Oxford, and when he returned to Europe in 1926, Osler had already died. SRR became Professor at Atlanta Medical College in 1912, the year Osler left for England, and was made Professor of Clinical Medicine at the newly-established Emory University in 1915. Their paths in life never crossed. The comparison, however, may be justified for these reasons:

1.) SRR was apparently called "The Osler of the South" in his lifetime. The letter from Seale Harris, a distinguished leader of Southern medicine, quoted at the beginning of the book and included in the appendix of the book, states that SRR was "frequently called 'the Osler of the South.'"

2.) Both were master clinicians. Patients were referred to SRR from many states and, like Osler, he travelled to many states by Pullman railway to visit patients. Doctors consulted him regularly on difficult cases. SRR made rounds daily at 8AM at Emory University Hospital then saw patients at the Roberts Clinic downtown beginning at 10AM.

3.) Both were medical writers. SRR was a prolific writer for his time and region; Atlanta was not Montreal. He published > 100 medical articles and a book on Pellagra.

4.) Both shared an early love of biology. SRR was first appointed Professor of Biology at Emory College obtained a master of science degree from the University of Chicago while on sabbatical. Osler's early devotion to biology is well known.

5.) Both were teacher of students and residents during their entire careers (SRR for 38 years). Like Osler, SRR wrote several articles on medical education, and both received numerous requests to advance the careers of students, trainees, and colleagues through recommendations. Dr. Boland, a surgeon at Emory and President of the Southern Medical Association (1936-7) wrote of SRR in 1925, after SRR had been on a medical faculty for 20 years (10 at Emory): "In all his work, nothing is dearer to him than the instruction of medical students, and hundreds of these throughout the country can attest to his talent for imparting knowledge."

6.) Both were medical historians, always members of medical and nonmedical history clubs, regularly giving presentations, some of which were published. On the walls at the Roberts Clinic were pictures of the "Founding Four" of Hopkins, distinguished physicians of Vienna, and Sir James Mackenzie, the Scottish cardiologist, to name a few.

7.) Both were bibliophiles who left their libraries to their respective alma maters.

7.) Both physicians wrote elegant prose, reflecting a classical and Christian education. The prose of SRR is not inferior to that of Osler.

8.) Like Osler, SRR was a member and leader of numerous medical societies, and elected President of 3 (one local, one regional, and one national). To attend meetings, he traveled widely and regularly by Pullman.

9.) The professional correspondence of both physicians was broad; for SRR it included numerous physicians in Georgia, in the South, and in the country. Most correspondents seemed to be friends based on a love of medicine and medical fellowship.

10.) The friendships of both men ranged widely: for SRR, a 1st tier of immediate and extended family in Atlanta, Macon, and Oxford, GA; a 2nd tier of lifelong friends, mostly from Emory; a 3rd tier of physicians all over Georgia and the South; and 4th tier of national colleagues. SRR was known as a "physician's doctor and a preacher's doctor," and he cultivated lifelong relationships, like Osler, with many in medicine and the ministry.

11.) Both physicians were well versed in the Bible. The father of Osler was an Anglican minister and the father of SRR was a Methodist minister. Both fathers and both sons had Classical and Christian educations, and the writings of SRR and Osler reflect that background.

12.) Both shared a love of European heritage, especially English. The Osler family was from Cornwall and the Roberts from Kent.

Both loved English poetry, lines from which they each quoted often in essays. While Osler traveled often to Europe and eventually moved to Oxford, England, for his final 12 years, SRR also went to Europe twice for medical purposes, in 1911 and in 1926, perhaps a rare feat among physicians in the poorest region of North America.

SRR made no major discovery and participated in no single monumental clinical event such as a new treatment or operation, but nor did Osler. Both achieved a career status that comes only from decades of scholarly work, combined with a humanitarian quality. Both shared a reverence for those who came before, which is evident in the writings of both, though they lived and worked in altogether different environments in North America.

If there were to be an Osler of the South after World War II, Charles S. Bryan, MD, of Columbia, SC, would be him perhaps. Bryan was a master clinician and scholar whose life and work are comparable to Osler's. The South as a region, however, became less and less distinct after 1945, as the country became more homogenous. The South of SRR's time, Appomattox to Pearl Harbor (1865-1941), was separate, economically and culturally, from the rest of the country.

President Roosevelt commissioned a study of the South on June 22, 1938, writing to "Members of the Conference on Economic Conditions of the South" on July 5, 1938:

> It is my conviction that the South presents right now the Nation's No. 1 economic problem—the Nation's problem, not merely the South's. For we have an economic unbalance in the Nation as a whole, due to this very condition of the South…It is an unbalance that can and must be righted, for the sake of the South and of the Nation.

The report was published a month later on July 25, 1938. It contained 15 sections on various subjects such as Soil, Water, Population, Education, and Health. In the first section on Economic Resources, the last paragraph reads:

> The paradox of the South is that while it is blessed by Nature with immense wealth, its people as a whole are the poorest in the country. Lacking industries of its own, the South has been forced to trade the richness of its soil, its minerals, and forests, and the labor of its people for goods manufactured elsewhere. If the South received such goods in sufficient quantity to meet its needs, it might consider itself adequately paid.

The Health section of the report (Figure 1) is a 1938 synopsis of the conditions in which SRR worked as a physician (1900-1941) for 4 decades. These conditions were in some ways different than those in which Osler worked during much of his career, certainly in Montreal and Oxford. Both physicians addressed public health concerns early in their careers, though among population demographics that were vastly different, at least Atlanta compared to Montreal or Oxford. At the annual meeting of the Southern Medical Association and through its publication, *Southern Medical Journal,* certain health issues, such as venereal disease and malaria and pellagra that disproportionately affected the South were regularly addressed.

The South in those 4 decades (1902-1941) of SRR's medical practice had a binary black-white racial demographic (71% white and 29% black in 1930), and an overwhelmingly rural population (>99% of Southerners in 1930 had been born in rural districts). The state of Georgia, in particular, had a black population percentage in 1900, the year SRR graduated from Southern Medical College, of 47%, and in 1940, a year before his death, it was 35%. In contrast, Pennsylvania in 1890, the approximate time of Osler's practice there, was >99% white, and Maryland in 1900, while Osler was in Baltimore, was 80% white. Montreal and Oxford were >99% white. Thus, the racial demographic in which each physician practiced was quite different, which also distinguished the South from other parts of the North America and Europe.

After Osler died in 1919, SRR wrote an essay, *Sir William Osler, Clinician, Teacher*, in which he expressed his admiration for Osler. A *Memorial Volume* of essays on Osler, edited by Maude E. Abbott, MD, was published in 1926. The essay on Osler by SRR

appears in this volume (and also in *Southern Medical Journal*), only one of 3 essays (out of 130) by authors residing south of the Potomac River (*Sir William Osler as Bibliophile* by Leonard L. Mackall of Savannah, Georgia, and *Recollections of Dr. Osler's Method* from Harry T. Marshall, MD, from the University of Virginia).

The Life

Many details of the life of SRR are recounted in the biography published by this writer in 1993. A detailed chronology, however, is given in this book. Briefly, SRR was born in Oxford, GA, in 1878, the eldest of 5 children, to James William Roberts, a Methodist minister, and his wife, Clifford Rebecca Stewart, a graduate of Wesleyan College in Macon.

James William Roberts and SRR seem to have had a complex relationship. Virtually nothing exists in writing to describe it. The father had graduated 1st in his class at Emory College in 1877, had been minister at the prominent Trinity Church in Atlanta, and then President of Wesleyan College in Macon. Most of his sermons at Trinity and many events of his life were published in the *Atlanta Constitution* newspaper; indeed, his life would be well chronicled by that newspaper, perhaps to the dismay of his eldest son. In private, typed notes "recorded presumably in preparation for a talk," SRR had a heading entitled "Whipping," under which he wrote:

> *Justified by "spare the rod and spoil the child." I have to confess with shame that I went about the house for some days with murderous hatred of my father locked within my bosom. Physical punishment not a wise element in the education of proud and sensitive children.*

James William Roberts left the ministry after 5 years at Wesleyan College, divorced his second wife (his first wife, Clifford Rebecca Stewart, the mother of SRR, had died of typhoid fever when SRR was 8 years of age), moved to Atlanta and worked with the Asa Candler of *Coca-Cola* to develop Druid Hills. He later remarried

his second wife and re-entered the church as a member, both of which events were chronicled by the Atlanta newspapers. His obituary in 1919 appeared on the front page of the *Atlanta Constitution*. His private will gave a smaller share of share estate to SRR, of all his 7 children (5 with first wife and 2 with second).

SRR went to Emory College in Oxford in his teens for 2 years but was withdrawn for a period of rest by his father because of "exhaustion." He then enrolled in Southern Medical College for 2 years, graduated, then returned to Emory College for the final 2 years, graduating with 1st honor, like his father.

SRR was the 4th generation of his family connected to Emory College. His maternal great-grandfather Starr had donated money to found the college in 1837, allowing for future members to attend by scholarship (no record affirms that SRR attended on this scholarship). His maternal grandfather, Joseph Spencer Stewart, graduated from Emory in 1849, the first on both the Stewart (maternal) and Roberts (paternal) lines. In general in these 2 families, the men went to Emory and the women went to Wesleyan, for both colleges were single gender at the time. In 1915, Emory University was established in Atlanta, and Emory-at-Oxford was subordinated to it. In that year, 1915, SRR was appointed Professor of Clinical Medicine and served Emory in Atlanta for the next 25 years. SRR delivered the Commencement Address to his alma matter in 1925. In that address is a paragraph that later became known as "The Emory Creed." Such was his lifelong love of Emory.

After graduation from Emory College in 1902, SRR was appointed Professor of Biology but took a leave of absence to obtain a master's degree in zoology at the University of Chicago. Upon his return to Emory College in Oxford, he taught biology, and was the campus physician. In 1905 he moved to Atlanta and began a lifelong private practice, with part-time academic appointments which was the customary relationship of practice to academia (full time professors were exceedingly rare). SRR was associated first with Atlanta Medical College, then Atlanta College of Physicians

and Surgeons, and finally, from 1915-1941, with Emory University School of Medicine as Professor of Clinical Medicine.

Early in his career, SRR took an interest in public health. On behalf of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), he travelled widely to college campuses to warn students of venereal disease which was rampant in the South. Later he served as Medical Director of the Atlanta Public Schools. Pellagra, a nutritional deficiency was ravaging the South, and he went to Italy and Austria in 1911 to study the disease, which lead to a published book on pellagra in 1912. When the Great War came, he joined with 2 of his brothers upon the entry of the USA in 1917, and was appointed Medical Director of Camp Jackson, SC, which was terribly affected by the Influenza Epidemic. His younger brother, Will, served as a surgeon in the Front in France.

Upon returning to Atlanta after the war, SRR opened The Roberts Clinic and resumed his teaching responsibilities at Emory. It was his custom to attend hospital patients at Wesley Memorial Hospital (now Emory University Hospital) in the morning and see patients at The Roberts Clinic in the afternoon, with a glass of Coca Cola always on hand between patients.

SRR always participated in local and national medical societies, especially the Southern Medical Association, becoming its President in 1924. He was also involved in the beginning of the American Heart Association, becoming its president in 1932, and a member of Advisory Editorial Board of its journal, *The American Heart Journal*, from 1926 to 1941.

He married twice, first to Louise MacDonald of Atlanta from 1905 to 1926, and then to Ruby Viola Holbrook, also of Atlanta. With the second wife, he had 3 sons, one of whom died early. The 2 other boys became physicians, one at Emory for most of his career in radiology, and one in cardiovascular research at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda and then Baylor University Medical Center in Dallas.

SRR lived on Ponce de Leon Avenue in the Druid Hills section of Atlanta for most of his adult medical career, but moved to a farm near Stone Mountain, GA, in 1936, at age 56 with his family, close enough to allow for a daily commute to Emory and The Roberts Clinic. SRR succumbed to heart failure at age 61, after 2 consecutive heart attacks. He was buried among family (Roberts, Stewart, Starr, etc) at Oxford Memorial Cemetery in Oxford, GA, the original home of Emory College.

SRR was modest in regard to his own abilities. He believed in "making the most of ordinary abilities….A genius is an ordinary person who works extraordinarily hard." His wife recorded the following remarks:

> *No, you are wrong about me. I am only an ordinary person, without special ability in any line. In most things I am only slightly above the average, and in many I am frankly under than over. This is certainly true of my physical equipment. I can't run. I'm only an ordinary walker and only a fair swimmer. I can probably ride a horse better than I can do anything else, but am certainly not a remarkable horseman. Neither am I a good shot. My eyesight is not strong, and I have to be close to my game to get any aim at all. As far as literary gifts are concerned, I am certainly not a brilliant writer. I have written a good deal, but I always have to slave over everything I put on paper.*

The Articles

The best single piece of writing in the collection, in this writer's opinion, is "An Ideal of Modern Medicine," which formed a portion of an address called "A Medical Center," delivered on December 16, 1915, as the retiring President of the Fulton County (Atlanta) Medical Society. "An Ideal" was extracted from the address and privately printed in Atlanta. It was republished by his second son in 1969 (Roberts WC. Dr. Stewart R. Roberts' "An Ideal of Modern Medicine." *Annals of Internal Medicine* 1969; 70: 1016-1017). This writer saw it in 1981 framed on the office wall of a pediatric cardiologist at Vanderbilt.

The best full article, in this writer's opinion, is called, "The Art and Human Nature," which was an address given at Harvard Medical School in Boston on October 28, 1931 (Roberts SR. The art and human nature. *New England Journal of Medicine* 1932; 206(2): 70-76) The elegant prose draws upon the heart and soul of SRR at 53 years of age, the prime of his career, after 3 decades in medicine, and reflects a combination of classical and Christian education. His last medical philosophical essay, "The Doctor's Visit," was an address delivered to the graduating medical and nursing classes of the University of Texas at Galveston on May 30, 1936 (Roberts SR. The Doctor's Visit. *Texas State Journal of Medicine* 1936; 32: 266-271). In correspondence SRR mentioned that he hoped to write a book called, "The Doctor's Visit," but it never came to pass. His only book was on pellagra in 1912.

SRR published historical essays in Charcot, William Osler, Benjamin Franklin, William Charles Wells, William C. Gorgas, Vesalius, Jane Todd Crawford, and unpublished manuscripts were found on George Washington and William Tecumseh Sherman, which were addresses given to the Symposium Club, a literary club in Atlanta. The Osler and Gorgas essays were published in the *Southern Medical Journal* and the William Charles Wells essay was published in the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* (which became the *New England Journal of Medicine*.) These historical essays combine considerable research with the touch of the artist. The essay on "William C. Gorgas of Alabama," for example, begins:

> In the South the Black Warrior River runs by way of the Tombigbee into the Alabama, the Alabama into Mobile Bay. The Bay is luxuriant with the rich purple of the water hyacinth, the yellow white of the floating lily, and green grace of the willow, and merges unnoticed, "too full for sound or foam," with the warm blue waters of the Gulf. The Gulf reaches to the Caribbean and is the fountain of that mysterious, self-conscious "river of the ocean," which flows round the tip of our new El Dorado upward by the Newfoundland banks beyond the Sargasso Sea to give the English climate what comfort it has and to the English spring its bewitching beauty. Along the north shore of the Gulf is that

> shadowy line which marks the end of cold and snow which men forego, and the beginning of the longer heat, the rainy season, and the stars of the tropical night.
>
> All along these Southern shores until recently were those two morbid masters, yellow fever and malaria, whose ever recurring human damage was in sad, sharp contrast with Nature's sweet unison of sun and water and flower…

The Presidential Address for the Southern Medical Association in 1925 and for the American Heart Association in 1934 was on medical history—the first on William C. Gorgas and the second on William Withering, a copy of which has, unfortunately, not been located.

SRR wrote several articles on pellagra, the niacin deficiency which affected the South so terribly. His only published book was on pellagra in 1912, a decade before Goldberger fully established the nutritional cause, written after a research trip to Italy and Austria to study the disease where it was also devastating. In the absence of a known cause, SRR focused on its myriad clinical presentations, now expressed often as "the four D's"—diarrhea, dermatitis, dementia, and death. In the first chapter he writes:

> One need not expect to find a typical pellagra. It is a disease of many symptoms and of many variations; its only consistency is its inconsistency; it seems cured and yet recurs; the pellagrin seems to be approaching his end and yet lives for many years; it spreads and is not contagious; the offspring of the pellagrin receives his mark and yet it is not inheritable; it is not and appears; it is and disappears; it is a morbid entity and yet it contains within itself many lesser entities; it falls with equal right in the sphere of dermatology, neurology, and gastrology, and yet it is a general disease; divers diseases become one, and this one is called pellagra; there is no pellagra—only the pellagrous.

In the Report to the President on "Economic Conditions of the South," even in 1938, 15 years after the cause was known, the disease still affected the South:

> The scourge of pellagra, that affects the South almost exclusively, is a disease chiefly due to inadequate diet; it responds to rather simple preventative measures, including suitable nourishing food; even in southern cities from 60 to 80 percent of the families of low incomes are spending for food less than enough to purchase an adequate diet.

Throughout his medical career, SRR addressed public health matters, including sexually-transmitted diseases. Not until 1928 was penicillin was discovered by Alexander Fleming, so for nearly 3 decades of medical practice, SRR did not have antibiotics to prescribe for bacterial infections. Several articles address infectious diseases such as pneumonia and malaria. Other public health articles address disease statistics in Georgia. He was a lifelong advocate for improving the health of the poor, and several articles present his views, which advocate universal health care coverage, a radical view which put him at odds with fellow physicians and public officials, including President Roosevelt.

Teaching was the subject of many articles, for he was a Professor of some category from 1902 to 1941, almost 4 decades. Like Osler, he believed in the full engagement of the student in the classroom and at the bedside, and not medical learning by lecture in a lecture hall. He encouraged reading and the study of history, and believed a small book is harder for an author to write than a big book.

All but 4 of the published articles of SRR are single-authored. Only with Dr. Roy Kracke, the distinguished Emory pathologist, did SRR join with other co-authors. These papers on agranulocytosis with Roy Kracke were perhaps the most important scientific articles in the bibliography of SRR; all were published in major journals. Agranulocytosis is a rare acute condition in which the absolute neutrophil (a type of white blood cell) count is < 100 neutrophils per microliter of blood, which makes a person vulnerable to severe infection.

Cardiovascular disease was the subject of 20 articles by SRR, all single-authored. The first in 1916 and the last in 1936 were on hypertension. His first paper on atherosclerosis was called, “Angina

Pectoris," in 1916, 4 years after James Herrick read his paper on "Clinical Features of Sudden Obstruction of the Coronary Arteries," which is considered a classic on acute myocardial infarction. Several papers of SRR address heart failure, the very condition he suffered from late in life after 2 myocardial infarctions.

SRR may be considered the first cardiologist in the South (certainly the first *academic* cardiologist in the South) in the opinion of this writer, because he: 1.) published 20 articles on cardiovascular disease published in a 3-decade period, 1916-1936; 2.) delivered numerous cardiovascular addresses in Atlanta, in Georgia, in the South, and in the country; 3.) owned and used the first electrocardiograph machine in Atlanta ("Old Ironhorse," a string galvanometer with 3 leads and floor space as big as a room); 4.) served on the first Advisory Editorial Board (12 years, 1925-1937), the only Southerner, of the *American Heart Journal*, the first cardiovascular specialty journal in the USA; 5.) served on the early Board of Directors (15 years, 1926-1941), the only Southerner, of the American Heart Association; 6.) served as President of the American Heart Association (1933-4), the first Southerner; 7.) was slated to be "grandfathered in" to the new cardiovascular specialty (1941) by the American Board of Medicine, only one of 2 Southerners; and 8.) confined his speaking engagements to heart disease after about 1933-4, his term as President of the American Heart Association ("I have been limiting my talks and papers in the last few years diseases of the heart and circulation." Personal letter, October 19, 1936). 9.) SRR described himself as "a heart specialist," and an associate at the Roberts Clinic, Dr. Van Buren, stated that he had a "tremendous cardiology practice," was "recognized as a cardiologist," and was a "first to advocate activity for cardiacs; prior to that, they were kept in bed for weeks." 10.) He held a Heart Clinic on Wednesday mornings at 9AM at Emory University Hospital. His focus on heart disease was early, academic, sustained, and rare in the South.

The Letters

Two boxes of letters came to this writer, long after the first slim biography was published in 1993. In these boxes were letters from 1935 to 1941, however, no letters were found for 1938 and 1939. It is conceivable that he was recovering from his first heart attack in 1938 and took a year off, however, many letters may simply be missing.

The total number of letters was about 600, however only 121 are included here. They were dictated to his secretary for many years, Miss Mary Mitchell, at the Roberts Clinic. None were hand written.

Letters give an insight into personality that formal published papers do not. The range of people that SRR corresponded with was wide, from prominent physicians in Boston to local farmers in Georgia. SRR seemed to write to everyone with a particular kindness and warmth. Other physicians were, of course, the main correspondents, and many letters not included here concerned patient care matters.

SRR also had several close epistolary friends, including Dr James King Hall, a prominent psychiatrist in Richmond who published frequently. Their friendship appeared to be deep and warm. At one time SRR traveled to Richmond at the invitation of Dr. Hall and gave a presentation on “Medical Care at Andersonville Confederate Prison,” a subject of great interest to SRR, whose several books on Confederate prisons remained on bookshelves in his widow’s home for decades. Dr. Hall gave a 2-volume book on the medical history of Virginia to the Fulton County Medical Society in honor of SRR after he passed.

This slice of time of letters of SRR gave this writer an additional insight into his personality. For example, in a letter to Dr. W. R. Houston, a physician who moved from Medical College of Georgia in Augusta to the academic faculty at the University of Texas in Austin, SRR wrote on June 17, 1936, “I certainly agree with you about freedom, only more so. It is why I could never tie myself up with church or educational institution and bend my back to their limitations.” In spite of his Christian faith and Emory loyalty, SRR

seemed to desire intellectual independence, the freedom to express himself without institutional restrictions.

In several letters, many not published here, one learned certain historical facts. For example, in a reference letter for a nurse dated May 19, 1936, SRR writes that she was "a graduate nurse to the Base Hospital at Jackson, South Carolina in the fall of 1918, for duty in the influenza epidemic that affected Camp Jackson at that time and overflowed the hospital with influenza and pneumonia patients."

The prose in the letters of SRR, presumably typed after direct dictation to his secretary transcribing in shorthand, at the Roberts Clinic, seems to come from a warmth of heart and authenticity of personality in the prime of his life. One reads in them no impatience or hubris, but rather understanding and humility.

The Legacy

SRR may be regarded, not only *during* his life, but perhaps *after* it as well, as "The Osler of the South," it being a distinct region by culture, economy and demography during the period (Appomattox to Pearl Harbor, 1865-1941) within which SRR lived. He was a Humanist, with a literary style, a clinical mastery, and a warm touch with patients, colleagues, and friends, to match the best of his place and time. To rise to national academic prominence from this region during this period was a notable achievement, perhaps on the same level as becoming a U.S. Senator from a Southern State. In his generation, no one could have been more Southern in heritage than SRR, and yet his similarities to Osler, a Canadian in the British Empire, were manifold. Both were finished products of Classical and Christian education who brought honor to the medical profession.

SRR may also be considered "the first cardiologist" in the South, in the opinion of this writer, based on his numerous cardiovascular writings and addresses, and his involvement in the initial years of the American Heart Association and its journal, *American Heart Journal.* The specialty of cardiology arose during his lifetime and

SRR embraced it as his own in the thirties, his last decade. Emory continued to have a rich history in cardiology, primarily through the educator, J. Willis Hurst, MD, who edited a textbook, *The Heart*, from 1966 through many editions.

The family legacy of SRR will be, of course, that he was the first of many Roberts and Stewarts to pursue the profession of medicine. He was the original. Apart from medicine, he reflected his heritage of 6 generations in the South and its educational emphasis. His English prose, such as these last lines from "An Ideal of Modern Medicine," may also serve to remind future physicians and surgeons in the family of the wisdom and beauty of humility:

> *May I remember that I am heir to the same diseases as my patients, must meet the same death, must pass with them beyond the River, and may I go with a smile.*

Life Chronology

1878 Born in Oxford, GA [home of Emory College], 36 miles from Atlanta center
Oldest of 5 children (mother died of typhoid along with 6th child)
Father: James William Roberts (A.B., Emory College, 1877, 1st Honor), Pastor at Trinity Church, Atlanta, across from State Capital and later President, Wesleyan College, Macon, GA, 1887-1902
Mother: Clifford Rebecca Stewart (A.B., Wesleyan College, 1875)

1887 Moved to Oxford along with 4 siblings when his mother dies of typhoid fever
"Miss Emmie" Stewart of Oxford, his mother's sister, takes over motherhood

1887-93 Palmer Institute, Oxford, GA and West End Academy, Atlanta, GA

1892-4 Preparatory Department, Emory College, under his father-in-law, Joseph Spencer Stewart [A.B., Emory College, 1849], the Superintendent