

September 29, 2009

Dear Dr. Colleagues:

Not too long ago on ward rounds I asked the residents and students if any of them had read *Don Quixote*. With a condescending chuckle, one of them confided, "We're the video generation, Dr. LaCombe. We don't read books." I was too dumbfounded to muster a come-back. Not read books? How can anyone not read books? I felt like running away to that secret society of book-lovers in *Fahrenheit 451*.

Osler admonished us to attend to our inner education, even to the point of giving us a list of books to keep at the bedside. Some now feel that list is out of date, much as they would no doubt fashion an oath of their own to substitute for Hippocrates'. Perhaps because of my age, or my education, or most likely because I am stuck in my ways, I believe the list to be a good one. It has served me well, inspiring one to be a good doctor with greater humanity, as Osler hoped it would do.

Would a book of excerpts of the world's great literature as recommended by Osler attract those 'video scholars'? If handfuls of high-quality mixed bird seed could be scattered on the lawn, might this attract those elusive songbirds to gather and pick, sift, and choose whatever best nourishes them? With the hard work and great writing of thirty-three scholars in the humanities, we have compiled such a book, containing excerpts from Shakespeare, the Bible, Montaigne, Marcus Aurelius, and yes, *Don Quixote*. *Osler's Bedside Library: Great Writers Who Inspired a Great Physician* is the result, just published by American College of Physicians Press and available both in hardcover and soft for your 'video scholars.' As such, this book is one way to answer Osler's charge:

*Before going to sleep read for half an hour, and in the morning have a book open on your dressing table. You will be surprised to find how much can be accomplished in the course of a year.*

ACP Press has made the book available as an ebook for the next two months for your inspection. I know you will be impressed by its content and scholarship and hope you peruse OBL and let your friends and students know about it. Perhaps you will be pleasantly surprised by a student whom you question about a particularly unfortunate patient and in reply she says:

*Sanity may be madness but the maddest of all is to see life as it is and not as it should be.*

I hope you enjoy the book.

Best wishes,

Michael A. LaCombe, MD