A man who would make an after-dinner speech may be forgiven if he selects a title that promises great and unexpected things. It is like a dinner menu, printed in a strange language. The appetite of the unsuspecting guest is whetted in anticipation when he discovers that he is about to be served something described, for example, as pièce de résistance even if, in retrospect, he should come to realize that it was only hash.

Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow is therefore an excellent title for my address. It could mean that you were to hear the polished prose of Sir William Osler. He was a Montrealer, physician and pathologist at the Montreal General Hospital and Professor at McGill before he started on his academic Odyssey. During his last years at Oxford I was fortunate enough to move in his orbit.

Listen to him as he gave to the students of medicine at Toronto the master-word in Medicine:

It is the open sesame to every portal, the great equalizer in the world, the true philosopher's stone, which transmutes all the base metal of humanity into gold. The stupid man among you it will make bright, the bright man brilliant, and the brilliant student steady.

...And the master-word is Work, a little one, as I have said, but fraught with momentous sequences if you can but write it on the tablets of your hearts, and bind it upon your foreheads.⁵

As you see, work sounds inviting when you call it the master-word, the open sesame to every portal!

My title for tonight's address could mean that you were to hear tragic poetry like that of John McCrae:

We are the Dead... Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, but now we lie,
In Flanders fields.⁴

McCrae was a Montrealer, a physician and pathologist at the Royal Victoria Hospital. He was a common man like you and me, until he stood in a trench in Flanders and heard above him the rushing sound of the wings of death.

 Permit me one more quotation from a man who was dear to us here in

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* Dinner address, American Academy of Neurosurgery, Windsor Hotel, Montreal, September 22, 1948.


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Montreal, Dr. Edward Archibald, member of the Society of Neurological Surgeons and the first to practise that specialty in Canada. Twenty years ago he brought William Cone and me to Montreal and then abandoned the field to us to do what we could with it, while he pursued his own brilliant career in thoracic surgery. He could really have done justice to the title I have chosen. But now, alas, I can only recall his words at the time of the opening of the Montreal Neurological Institute:

The nervous system is one of the most difficult parts of a man’s frame to understand. Few subjects in Medicine have demanded of investigators as great an intellectual capacity or as arduous a labour. And in that very fact lies the reason and the justification for neurological specialism. The earnest man knows that neurology demands his whole life. But his guerdon is great.

To gather knowledge, and to find out new knowledge, is the noblest occupation of the physician. To apply that knowledge with understanding, and with sympathy born of understanding, to the relief of human suffering is his loveliest occupation; and to do both with an unassuming faithfulness sets the seal on the whole.¹

So, I have given you the menu of this address. You might say I have proposed the toast, and three Montrealers more eloquent than I have responded to it. We Montreal neurologists and neurosurgeons welcome you, our guests from far and near.

Now I must draw forth from my own literary oven the pièce de résistance. I do so with a sinking heart, for I know quite well that when you, honest men and women, have sampled it, you can only pronounce it hash. Nevertheless, here it is—Neurological Surgery, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow.

Yesterday, between 1870 and 1900, neurosurgery was born in England. Principles such as localization of function within the nervous system, asepsis, anaesthesia, were combined so as to make possible a new therapy. This was the period of advance in the basic science of our specialty.

Today, from 1900 to now, we see the evolution of the technique of the surgery of the nervous system, chiefly in the United States. It is a familiar pattern: basic science in Europe, applied science here; basic atomic research in Europe, the “atom bomb” here. I hope to indicate that the time has come for us to turn our attention to basic research as well as to its application.

Cobb Pilcher took as the title of his excellent presidential address to the Harvey Cushing Society less than a month ago: “Neurosurgery Comes of Age.” So it has, physically, if not intellectually!

Young surgeons who have learned to use the scalpel so expertly that they can take anything out of anywhere without a fatality, to cut the pathways of the currents of the intellect and leave a man who is still capable of walking, may be tempted to look upon the performance of the pioneers in the earlier period with unjustified contempt.

Elaboration of surgical technique is an important mechanical achievement. But beware of vainglory; for it may be that our intellectual maturity is yet far off, and to be acquired only after years of further pioneering.

While Edward Jenner, a country practitioner, was elaborating the hy-