

Alex Walk, Mentor and Friend

If I may parody James Agate, who was talking about Sir Henry Irving, who in turn parodied Dr Johnson, who was talking about a gentleman of the name of Hume: 'If anybody thinks Alexander Walk was the greatest member of our College of modern times and does not say so, he lies. If he does not think so, he is mad.' I submit this judgment with little fear of contradiction; but should anyone choose to doubt me, let him only glance through Natalie Cobbing's detailed list of the high offices Walk has held, any one of which would cause us to sing praise unto his name.

And yet there is more, much more, in him to be praised. Were I asked to place his talents in rank order I would mention first and foremost his towering scholarship. And I speak with some authority, for it has been my singular good fortune to have sat at his feet and picked up crumbs of his great learning at various stages in my career. It is surprising, come to think, how often over the years I have followed in his giant footsteps.

My first meeting with him was in 1939 when as an assistant medical officer, the lowest of the low in the medical hierarchy of the London County Mental Hospital Service, I was released for a year to attend a DPM course at The Maudsley. Visits were then arranged to various hospitals in the London area, including Horton Hospital, Epsom, at which Walk was serving as Deputy Superintendent, one rung below the Throne of Heaven. Horton was then rightly famed for its enormously important contribution to the development of the malaria treatment of neurosyphilis. The visit was splendidly organized: C. P. Shute, risen from a humble baker's lad to a scientist of international fame, laid on a superb demonstration, the high spot of which was his dissection of the salivary glands of the mosquito. Dr Maeve Whelan attended to the clinical aspects of malaria treatment, in particular, of GPI. Alexander Walk followed with a history of malaria treatment in general and the history of the Horton Malaria Laboratory in particular. I was struck, I remember, by his mellifluous voice, his careful diction and the way he wore all that weight of learning so lightly.

For six years, between 1941 and 1947, I had to attend to the business of defeating Hitler. This being done, I returned to the service of the LGC as a 'second' medical officer. As good luck would have it I was posted to Cane Hill Hospital, Coulsdon, where Walk had been transferred as Deputy Superintendent, Horton, having been for the duration transformed into an EMS hospital. Not only this, but I acted as

what today would be known as his registrar. At Cane Hill I had the rare opportunity of working with him until, exactly a year later, I was posted to Horton where I too, in the fullness of time, was promoted Deputy Superintendent. From Walk I learned a great deal of clinical psychiatry for which I am deeply grateful. I am even more grateful for his extra-curricular influences: almost by a process of osmosis I was able to soak up some of his reverence for books, particularly antiquarian books, and a little of his preoccupation with medical history.

It is, of course, as a medical historian, one other facet of his scholarship, that his reputation is so firmly founded. It has been said that all philosophy is a footnote to the writings of Plato. I am no philosopher and am in no position to say yea or nay. But I know now some medical history and would go so far as to say that nothing can ever be usefully added to Walk's contribution to the history of English psychiatry in the nineteenth century. For the record let me list his published works in this field:

- Aspects of the 'Moral Treatment' of the Insane (1954) *Journal of Mental Science*, 100, 807-37.
- 'On the State of Lunacy' Presidential Address to APSW (1957) *Journal of Mental Science*, 105, 879-92.
- The History of Mental Nursing Presidential Address to RMPA (1961) *Journal of Mental Science*, 107, 1-17.
- Gloucester and the Beginnings of the RMPA (1961) *Journal of Mental Science*, 107, 603-32.
- 'Mental Hospitals' Chapter in *The Evolution of Hospitals in Britain* (1962) Ed. Poynter. London: Pitman.
- The Pre-History of Child Psychiatry (1964) *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 110, 754-67.
- Lincoln and Non-Restraint (1970) *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 117, 481-95.
- Medico-Psychologists, Maudsley and The Maudsley (Squibb Lecture) (1975) *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 128, 19-30.
- 'Forty Years of Wanderings': The Medico-Psychological Association, 1855-1894 (1978) *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 132, 530-47.

It is indeed his intimate knowledge of this period of medical history that is reflected in what must be regarded as the most important section of the Library at the Royal College of Psychiatrists. It was due entirely to his efforts that, during his services as Librarian from 1945 to 1971, substantial additions to the historical collection were made. He bought very astutely, and it can be fairly said that his purchases represent a substantial asset to the College, both academically and materially.

Now, as Librarian, I again, and not without great trepidation, follow Walk. It is in this context that I would like to register my profound appreciation of the help he has given me in reassembling the Library in its new and permanent home. Without him the Library might still be an elegant but bookless salon.

I have tried as best I can to pay tribute to Alexander Walk, the scholar. Perhaps I need not have bothered. Perhaps I should have just left it to Chaucer, who paid a far more eloquent tribute to

him six centuries ago:

'But al that he mighte of his freendes hente,
On bokes and on lerninge he it spente.
Of studie took he most cure and most hede,
Noght a word spak he more than was nede,
and that was seyde in forme and reverence.
and short and quick, and ful of hy sentence.
Souninge in moral vertu was his speche,
And gladly wolde he lerne, and gladly teche.'

HENRY R. ROLLIN

Dr Walk's Dinner

As a tribute to Dr Walk and to mark his fifty years of service to the RMPA and the College, a dinner in his honour was held at the Royal Society of Medicine on Friday, 12 May. The President presided, and past

and present Editors and Assistant Editors and Fellows and Members of the College and its staff who have worked closely with Dr Walk over the years were present.

M.R.C. PSYCH. EXAMINATIONS—AUTUMN 1978

The next M.R.C.Psych. Examinations will take place on the following dates:

Preliminary Test—Wednesday 27 September 1978
Membership Examination (written papers)—
Wednesday 8 November 1978
Membership Examination (clinical and orals)—
Monday 13 to Wednesday 15 November 1978

The closing date for receipt of entries is
WEDNESDAY 30 AUGUST 1978.

The written part will be held in London, Birmingham, Glasgow and Dublin; clinical and oral examinations in London, Birmingham and Glasgow.

Late entries **WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED**. Where candidates have undertaken part-time or overseas experience in psychiatry, or are required to submit the name and address of their Clinical Tutor or Consultant Chief, the entry forms should be submitted at least three weeks in advance so that the application may be finalized before the closing date is reached.

All candidates are required to pass the Preliminary Test before sitting for the Membership Examination.

Regulations and application forms are obtainable from the Examinations Secretary, 17 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PG, together with copies of past MCQ and essay question papers at 50p per set for 1971–1975, 20p per set for 1976 and 25p per set for 1977, inclusive of UK postage. Airmail postage is extra according to zone.

The 4th Edition of the *Reading List in Psychiatry* is available direct from Messrs Headley Brothers Ltd, Ashford, Kent TN24 8HH, at a cost of 40p including UK postage. Air mail postage extra. Cheques/postal orders should be made payable to 'Headley Brothers Ltd'.

All Members and Fellows are asked to bring this announcement to the notice of any prospective candidates working under their guidance.

THOMAS BEWLEY

Dean