



columns

Sir Martin Roth

Martin Roth was the most respected and the most successful psychiatrist of his generation. He was born into an orthodox Jewish family in Budapest, Hungary, on 6 November 1917. In 1925 the family moved to London where his father, a cantor, had accepted a position in a synagogue in the East End.

Roth attended the Davenant Foundation School, famed for educating talented boys, mainly Jewish, who went on to become professionals; the majority became doctors. Roth was an excellent example of the school's success, not only scholastically, but also musically; he showed, as a mere boy, his talent as a pianist, a talent he exhibited and enjoyed throughout his life.

Roth opted for medicine and was given a place at St Mary's Medical School, Paddington, where he qualified MBBS (Lond) in 1942. Thereafter, with exemplary speed, he added to this the MRCP (Lond) and MD (Lond). By that time he had decided that neurology was to be his metier, but he was so impressed by the teachings of one of his mentors, Lord Russell Brain, that he felt compelled to change tack and decided to become a psychiatrist rather than a neurologist.

To this end, he went to the Maudsley Hospital, the Mecca of academic psychiatry in the UK. He was chosen as senior registrar to Professor Sir Aubrey Lewis but, sadly, the two, both of them intellectual Titans, proved to be incompatible and Roth quit the Maudsley prematurely.

His next stop was at the Crichton Hospital, Dumfries, Scotland, where Professor Mayer-Gross, an eminent refugee from Nazi Germany and a teacher and friend from the Maudsley, was the Director of Research. In the relaxed atmosphere of the Crichton, Roth found an opportunity to study, reflect and write. But of most importance was the invitation to join Mayer-Gross and Eliot Slater in writing a new, comprehensive textbook of psychiatry, entitled simply *Textbook of Clinical Psychiatry*. It was a huge success and became the standard work world-wide. It was translated into five languages and ran to three editions, the last written mainly by Roth himself.

Next on the list of his postings was as Director of Clinical Research at Graylingwell Hospital, Sussex. Here, *inter alia*, he continued what had become his major preoccupation, namely, the differentiation and classification of mental diseases, mainly those associated with old age.

Then, what was to be a benchmark in his career, in the mid 1950s came recognition by the scientific and psychiatric community of the real worth of Roth as thinker, philosopher and, particularly, as a researcher. Prestigious jobs and important invitations to speak at universities and

institutions poured in from all over the globe. Glittering honours and prizes were showered on him; suddenly, the world was his oyster.

First in the academic queue was an invitation in 1956 to become Clinical Professor and Head of Psychiatry at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. Under his leadership, the department blossomed and became recognised as one of the leaders in the field. It is no coincidence that during his tenure at Newcastle, Roth was created Knight of the British Empire. But the honour he cherished most was his election in 1996 to the Royal Society.

There was yet another even more prestigious academic honour. In 1976, he became the first Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Cambridge. As he had done in the past, he succeeded in building up a highly successful centre for research, but on this occasion from scratch.

In 1985, Roth retired from his Cambridge chair but this did not stop him working. Far from it; he continued to further his researches as before, until, in his eighties, the signs and symptoms of his final illness called a halt.

There is one other triumph to record, one totally unconnected with the intricacies of research: he was elected the first President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. He took up his duties in 1972, duties that were concerned with administration, politics and finance, most of them new to him. None the less, he mastered them all brilliantly and with panache. Today, the College is in fine fettle, far removed from the puny, puking infant left behind by its precursor, the old Royal Medico-Psychological Association in 1972. A good deal of its robust growth is due to Sir Martin Roth's expert early nurture. The College is, and always will be, a monument to his skill.

Sir Martin Roth died, aged 88, at Cambridge on 26 September 2006. He leaves behind him his devoted wife Constance, three talented daughters and nine grandchildren, not forgetting a host of friends, colleagues and ex-pupils.

Henry R. Rollin

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Address given at the memorial service for Professor Sir Martin Roth at Trinity College Chapel, Cambridge on 20 January 2007

Amidst the beautiful readings and prayers today and after Fauré's Sanctus, it is a daunting task to have to speak in plain speech. We will shortly hear the sublime

words of the Jewish Memorial Prayer to set before the God of mercy and compassion 'all the meritorious and pious deeds which Martin did on earth'. This is a man who, among his meritorious deeds, had at the age of 37 published a textbook which defined psychiatry for a generation, at 42 had helped to work out the World Health Organization (WHO) classification of psychiatric disorders, at 49 had worked out the pathological basis of dementia, at 54 was elected first President of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, and was honoured with a knighthood at 55.

Many would have been proud of any one of these as their lifetime's achievement. Was there anything left for him to do after that? He went on to become Foundation Professor of Psychiatry at Cambridge and a Fellow of Trinity College at 60. And then, in his late 60s, he went on to help work out the molecular basis of Alzheimer's disease and the theoretical basis of a treatment, and was honoured again by election as a Fellow of the Royal Society at 79.

I should simply fall silent in gratitude for the privilege of having accompanied such a man as a pupil, colleague and friend for the past 25 years. It is only friendship and love which give me the audacity to speak, and I do so on behalf of us all. Here, we are all drawn together for a moment in love, friendship, collegiality and admiration, united in the face of that leveller of all human achievement, death. There is an almost animal instinct at work here, that draws us together to share our sense of loss, for some of a husband/father/grandfather, for some of a colleague or teacher, for some their physician, and for some just a friend. Yet we are to come away with an ability to let go, and for the sense of loss to be transformed into joy and celebration at having enjoyed the gift of such a man among us, that we had a share in his full life, a life well lived and well spent, the good life of a good man.

The family asks us to consider Sir Martin's life as laid down in Ecclesiasticus. 'Treat the physician with honour', we are told, 'because we have need of him, and because his gift comes from the Most High.' We are told that 'God gave skill to men that He (God) might be glorified in His marvellous works.'

Sir Martin fulfilled the type of the good physician. I particularly remember an occasion when I was training, and he helped me with the assessment of a dishevelled, filthy schizophrenic woman. He spoke to her with such extraordinary kindness and respect for her person, I should actually say with such love, compassion and understanding for her pain, that I was deeply moved by what I saw. Because we are frail and afraid, may we all fall when we have need into the hands of a good physician, just such as Sir Martin was.