

A Most Unusual Gift

It was with great pleasure and not a little pride that, at the last meeting of Council on 18 March, I asked the President to accept, on behalf of the College, a gift of silver and silver plate from the medical officers of Horton Hospital, Epsom. The gift—all that remained, in fact, of the plate that belonged to, and at one time adorned, the table of Horton medical officers' mess—comprised a large salver, three vegetable dishes with their lids, and an elaborate, baroque, tripod centre-piece.

These items, apart from their intrinsic value, are of considerable historical interest. They are in themselves reminders of an age of elegance, long since sacrificed on the altar of a phoney egalitarianism, when medical officers enjoyed, not only primacy in the social and professional hierarchies in the hospitals in which they worked, but the privacy of their own mess. It sounds élitist. It was.

Doctors had their own kitchen; their meals were served by uniformed staff on tables decked with spotless linen embellished with high-quality cutlery and glass and with whatever plate the mess boasted. It was a time-honoured custom—as it still is in so many institutions enjoying a collegiate life—to present items of plate on leaving a mess, either on retirement or on promotion elsewhere. In this way Horton acquired its collection, a collection with which I became very familiar when, for twenty-five years or more, I served as Mess President—the very last of that breed, alas.

But of particular importance in the context of history is the sterling silver centre-piece. It is most unusual in that it bears, not one, but two inscriptions. The first records its presentation by Sir Frederick Mott to Dr. John R. Lord, the Medical Superintendent of Horton Hospital, and the second its presentation by Dr. Lord to Horton Hospital Medical Officers' Mess in 1931.

Sir Frederick Walker Mott (1853-1926) was, as is well known, among other things, for many years Pathologist to the London County Mental Hospitals and did pioneer research work into the pathology of the nervous system and later of the endocrine glands, especially in relation to mental disorder. He was the last President in 1925-26, of the Medico-Psychological Association and the first of the *Royal Medico-Psychological Association*, the prefix 'Royal' and the Charter of Incorporation having been granted in March 1926. He died in June of the same year before completing his Presidency.

For the Association's elevation of status, Dr Lord was

largely responsible. Dr John Robert Lord (1874-1931) was an outstanding Medical Superintendent of Horton. Something of his work and personality has been described by Dr A. Walk in his account of the 1926 Annual Meeting of the RMPA (*News and Notes*, October 1976, p. 3). Here it may be recalled that his long term of office, from 1907 to 1931, included the war years 1914-1919, during which Horton was transformed into a military hospital. Lord, with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel, RAMC, was Commanding Officer, for which service he was, in 1918, created a CBE (Military Division). It is of passing interest that for the rest of his life, Lord stuck to his military title and was invariably known as 'Colonel Lord'.

Lord played an enormously important part in the life of the Medico-Psychological Association and subsequently, the RMPA, as well as in many other activities on behalf of psychiatry, such as the foundation of the National Council for Mental Hygiene (afterwards incorporated in the NAMH). He will be best remembered, however, for his long and devoted service to the *Journal of Mental Science*, the precursor of the *British Journal of Psychiatry*. He served first as Assistant Editor from 1900 to 1911 and then as one of the Editors from 1911 until his death in 1931; in fact the management of the *Journal* was almost entirely in his hands. However, because of the totality of his work for the MPA, his colleagues thought it only fitting that, despite failing health, he should be elected President of the new-styled RMPA. He was Mott's immediate successor, and took office at the memorable Annual Meeting in 1926.

So it is that in this one silver ornament are enshrined the names of two great men who did honour to their profession and gave of their best to this College. It is, to my mind, only poetic justice that the centre-piece has come into the safe-keeping of the college where it will once more serve to embellish the table of colleagues dining together, and at the same time act as a source of inspiration for ourselves and our successors.

We are all indebted to the medical officers of Horton for making this unique gift possible. It occurs to me, incidentally, that this historic event might spur other hospitals to engage in a similar Proustian excursion, *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, and present comparable treasure to the College. They are all part of our heritage, and it is right and proper that the college should act as their guardian.

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