

W. MAYER-GROSS, M.D., F.R.C.P.

Our Society's second President, Dr. Willy Mayer-Gross, died suddenly at his home in Birmingham on February 14th, at the age of 72. He was a truly great man whose influence on European psychiatry, as well as that of Britain, will long be remembered.

He was born in 1889 at Bingen-am-Rhein in Germany and graduated M.D. (Heidelberg) in 1912. During his military service in the first world war he showed an interest in nervous diseases and on leaving the army became an assistant in the University of Heidelberg Psychiatric Clinic under Professors Nissl and Wilmanns, later becoming deputy director of the clinic and from 1929 onwards, associate professor of psychiatry at that University. At about this time he became editor in chief of "Der Nervenarzt."

At Heidelberg he was associated with such men as Beringer and Gruhle and devoted much of his time to making observations on psychiatric patients with a view to clarifying diagnosis and nomenclature. His interest in Schizophrenia is evident in his presentation of the Heidelberg views in the Neuro-psychiatric "Handbuch" edited by Bumke. In the early 30's many Jews holding professional appointments were dismissed from their posts and Mayer-Gross told me on one occasion, that he returned home one night in 1933 to find that his house was requisitioned for the Nazi party, and so had to leave. His ever growing reputation gave him the blessing of many good friends in this country and so Edward Mapother, with help from the Commonwealth and Rockefeller foundations, was able to offer him a post in clinical research at the Maudsley Hospital, London. Such a post was unique in British psychiatry at the time, but it enabled Mayer-Gross to shape the teaching of psychiatry along the lines of his Heidelberg researches. In 1939 he was appointed Consultant Psychiatrist and director of Clinical Research at the Crichton Royal Hospital in Dumfries, and soon after became a naturalised British subject.

In our Society we came to know him best as the senior fellow in the department of experimental psychiatry and director of clinical research at the Uffculme Clinic. We also knew him well as the senior author of the text book "Clinical Psychiatry" which was published in 1954, a book which has been translated into several languages and has now appeared in Britain in a second edition. He was the author of a very large number of papers in many fields of psychiatry. Thus he was not only to perfect the Insulin Coma Treatment of Schizophrenia, but used it as a model psychosis for neurological, psychiatric and biochemical investigations. It was these observations that did much to further his interest in the experimental psychoses by drugs such as Mescaline and Lysergic Acid.

In 1945 he received the Diploma of Membership of the Royal College of Physicians of London, being elected a fellow in 1951. In 1954 he was elected President of the psychiatric section of the Royal Society of Medicine, and at the time of his death had been nominated for an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Science in the University of Durham. In 1956, he visited Bangalore where he helped to build the first Indian psychiatric clinic with facilities for teaching and research, on behalf of the World Health Organisation to whom he was appointed a psychiatric consultant.

Many foreign doctors persecuted by the Nazis have come to this country, but few have been of the calibre of Mayer-Gross, and it is not surprising that his foreign background proved to be of little disadvantage. He was always friendly, willing to help and was a born teacher with some contempt for statistics. He addressed our Society late in 1960 and gave a memorable account of developments in the

subnormality field (1). The address he gave us showed us clearly that he was a master in this field as well as the more conventional one of mental illness. After the meeting he told me of his proposed retirement back to his loved city of Heidelberg, and said that his wife was delighted to think that the house which they had had to give up under compulsion had been handed back to them by the German authorities. He himself felt in two minds as to whether to go back, for he had made so many friends in England and in Birmingham in particular that I think he was a little loth to return to his Alma Mater whence his old friends had long since gone.

The loss of the leadership and companionship of a great figure in our world is a loss to us all, and the sympathy of the Society goes to his wife, whom he married in 1919, and to his son and his mother who also survive him.

F.J.S.E.

(1) W. MAYER-GROSS. Biological Aspects of the Milder Forms of Mental Subnormality. J. Ment. Subnorm. 1960, 11, pp. 51-54.