

Online archive 12

Frederick Mott (1853–1926)

Sir Frederick Mott was a prominent neurologist and pathologist whose views led to the founding of a hospital (later named after Henry Maudsley) to which patients could be admitted informally and which had provision for research. This was the start of a move away from the old asylum tradition and the beginning of more successful research and education in psychiatry.

Frederick Mott was born in 1853. His parents died when he was a child. He was educated at University College, London, qualifying M.B. in 1881 and MD in 1886. He had many distinctions and became an Assistant and Professor of Physiology at Liverpool for twelve months and then a lecturer in Physiology at Charing Cross. He became an FRCP in 1897 and FRS in 1896. In Professor Schafer's laboratory at University College he had studied the structure and functions of the central nervous system and its diseases. In 1895 the London City Council (LCC) appointed him as Pathologist in charge of the new laboratory it was proposing to establish at Claybury Hospital. He accepted this post but stipulated retaining his clinical appointment at Charing Cross Hospital. The Claybury Laboratory was later transferred to the new Maudsley Hospital where it became the nucleus for what was later to be the Institute. After he retired in 1918 he continued to teach at The Maudsley and lectured on 'morbid psychology' at Birmingham.

While at Claybury Hospital after the laboratory had been running for ten years, during which Mott and his colleagues had won for it an international reputation, it was provided with a separate building. Mott, a man of great energy and self-confidence, tackled some of the most challenging problems of psychiatry. He stimulated, or himself carried out, research into the syphilitic nature of general paralysis, endocrine and metabolic abnormalities in dementia praecox and the heredity of mental disorders. He established

that asylum dysentery (?) was associated with micro organisms and that GPI was a manifestation of syphilis.

As director of the London County Council Central Pathological Laboratory at Claybury Asylum, Mott was active in tackling some of the most challenging problems of psychiatry. He had the major share in the founding of the Maudsley Hospital. Mott had broad views about what should be done to further clinical psychiatry. ‘We need,’ he wrote in 1903, ‘means of intercepting for hospital treatment such cases of incipient and acute insanity as are not yet certifiable ... A certain number of cases would thus come under observation willingly and in time to retard the progress of the disease.’ It was an idea he had proposed to the London County Council shortly after he started working for them. In 1907 he returned to the subject, and extended the scope of his proposal:

‘Another fruitful field of study in psychiatry would be those early cases of uncertifiable mental affection termed neurasthenia, psychasthenia, obsession ... hysteria and hypochondria, which in many instances are really the prodromal stages of a pronounced and permanent mental disorder. Such cases are often in the hopeful and curative stages, and these, if studied carefully by trained medico-psychologists, could not fail to yield valuable results ... If suitable postgraduate training in medico-psychology and neuropathology were established, doubtless the University and licensing bodies might be induced to establish a diploma.’

British psychiatrists at that time were isolated from their medical colleagues and from universities. The system was different in Germany where academic psychiatrists had university posts and clinics in general hospitals. They had very much better facilities for teaching and research. Kraepelin in Munich had identified the differences in outcomes from two types of major mental illness (affective psychoses and the schizophrenias). Karl Jaspers later in such a setting could clarify the phenomenological approach to diagnosis. Aware of Mott’s views, which coincided with his own, Maudsley decided to seek his cooperation. He had retired from practice in 1903 with a sizeable income and he was

childless. Mott had visited Kraepelin's clinic at Munich and was able to formulate detailed and practical proposals to put to the LCC on the need for early treatment, research and teaching in a suitable hospital environment. (Kraepelin did not think he would be successful.) Maudsley left all the negotiations to his colleague. He was prepared to supply the finance and his identity was not disclosed until the Council had agreed to accept his offer of £30 000 for the project. In 1907, the LCC agreed there should be 75 to 100 inpatients in the projected hospital, an outpatient department and suitable provision for research. Mott's laboratory would be transferred from Claybury to the new hospital, and recognition would be sought for the Maudsley as a School of the University of London.

Mott had been elected President of the Medico-Psychological Association for 1926 but died before he could take up this post.

References

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