

## Walter Symington Maclay: An Appreciation

When Walter Maclay died in April, 1964, the Royal Medico-Psychological Association lost its President-Elect at a turning point in its fortunes, and Britain lost a great champion in the advance of mental health. How it was that he was able to do so much can be traced above all to the warmth and goodness and strength of his personality. He seldom spoke of himself; but on one occasion, when he showed a friend a print, hanging in his office, of a great fish struggling upstream against a torrent of water, "That is me", he said. The words, spoken with a touch of irony, were perhaps truer than he realized. The picture symbolized not only the steady determination which characterized him but also his instinctive awareness of the goal ahead.

He was endowed with great family and personal assets. Of his family the best known perhaps are his father, the first Lord Maclay, shipowner and Minister of Shipping in the first World War, and his brother John, Lord Muirshiel, Secretary of State for Scotland; but several other members established and carried on a tradition of public and philanthropic service.

Walter Maclay's early career followed no easy or conventional pattern, for after qualifying from Cambridge and Bart's and taking the D.T.M.&H. at Liverpool, he left for Africa with his wife and for three years deputized for medical missionaries in Kenya, Nyasaland and the remote parts of South Africa. Personal hardships and fierce tests of clinical ability gave him experience which others acquire in a lifetime, and this was further enlarged, after his return, by work with sick children and sufferers from chest diseases. In 1932 he turned to psychiatry, joining the staff of the Maudsley Hospital and soon taking his place as one of the brilliant group who worked under Mapother's leadership. When, on the outbreak of the second World War, the Maudsley organization was dispersed, Maclay was given charge of that section which occupied the buildings of Mill

Hill School. His success in improvising and expanding the services needed to meet war-time conditions marked him out for further administrative advancement.

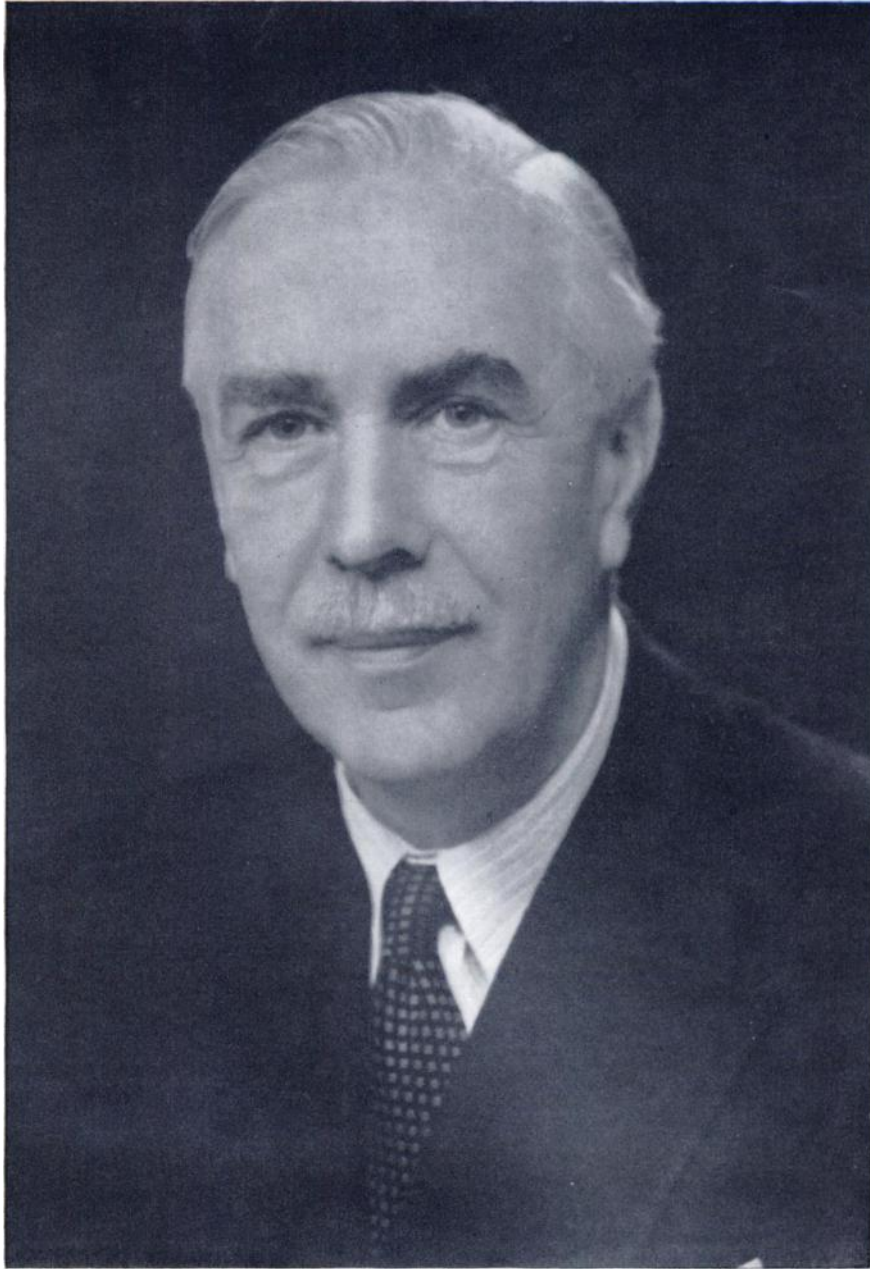
The psychiatric world was stirring; new treatments had come into use, new freedoms were envisaged and the conviction that out-of-date procedures must be discarded was growing, not only in the hospitals, but in the central departments—the Ministry of Health and the Board of Control. Hence it was right that Maclay, still comparatively a young man, should have been appointed a Senior Commissioner of the Board on the retirement of Sir Hubert Bond. Keeping himself as untrammelled as might be by officialdom, for which he had little use, he applied his experience and vision to furthering the development of psychiatric services within the scope of the newly-instituted National Health Service. By 1954 that same experience and vision impressed and influenced the Royal Commission on Mental Health Law, and after the publication of its Report his influence was seen again in the drafting and implementation of the 1959 Mental Health Act. With the abolition of the Board of Control, Maclay continued as the head of the psychiatric staff of the Ministry of Health until ill-health forced his retirement in 1961. During all this time he never divorced himself from clinical work, in the shape of a weekly out-patient session at the Maudsley Hospital.

He wrote on both clinical and administrative subjects, and perhaps the best exposition of his ideas and hopes is to be found in his Adolf Meyer Lecture, "A Mental Health Service", published in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* in September, 1963.

As an administrator he was not always easy to follow and sometimes appeared unpredictable; yet he had a remarkable inner strength. Through the opposing current he never failed to make his way upstream. But as a rule circumstances were propitious for administrative

reform, and he had the practical wisdom to get the best out of them. Considerate, easy and gracious in his manners, and totally without arrogance, he could be very persuasive. He had the gift of getting others, especially those in key positions, to see things his way. He enjoyed his work, like all the good things of life. His cheerfulness and optimism carried him through the

darkest places. Always before him was the aim to bring freer air and new opportunities to psychiatry. This took him to many countries and to many gatherings and congresses. He was a great international figure. In all his contacts, with patients and colleagues and legislators, he won his way by the friendliness and esteem which were instantly his.



**WALTER SYMINGTON MACLAY**

President Elect 1963-64

Died 27th April, 1964