

Sigmund Freud and Havelock Ellis

The Dialogue and the Debate—By VINCENT BROME

AT A VERY advanced stage of the subtle relationship which developed between these two men Freud burst out in exasperation one day, "It's not so much Havelock Ellis' ignorance that matters—it's his knowing so many things that are not so." Driven to this attack by the tenacity with which Ellis insisted that Freud underestimated the heredity factors in homosexuality, his words never went beyond the walls of Freud's study, but left a sardonic echo in the memory of Ernest Jones who decided to exclude them from his *Life of Freud*. With that devotion to the Master which introduced a suspicion of bias into Jones' attitude towards Freud, Jones was disdainful of the relationship between Freud and Ellis and spoke explosively of any attempt to associate the English "seer" with his Viennese counterpart.

Looking back over the years it is possible to establish identities between Ellis and Freud as remarkable as the differences on which they finally split. Socially and scientifically their backgrounds were opposed, but both came to medicine in the same decade with some apprehension, both had no special sense of vocation, and Freud frequently wished "that he could retire from medical practice and devote himself to unravelling cultural problems," a desire close to the heart of Havelock Ellis.

After forty-one years of medical activity, my self-knowledge tells me that I have never really been a doctor in the proper sense. I became a doctor through being compelled to deviate from my original purpose; and the triumph of my life lies in my having, after a long and round-about journey, found my way back to my earlier path.

Written by Freud about himself, it roughly described what happened to Havelock Ellis.

Freud's early student days were little more distinguished than Ellis'. Of his first rigorosum in chemistry, botany, and zoology, he said, "I escaped disaster only through the clemency of fate or that of my examiners," and in general medicine he came through, like Ellis, as merely satisfactory. It needed a philanthropic patron to sustain Freud in his medical studies, as Miss Caroline Haddon made possible the completion of Ellis' training. Freud's state of chronic poverty persisted for years, and if, unlike the poverty of Ellis, it prevented his marrying the woman of his choice for a painfully prolonged period, it was not, in the end, quite so enduring. A visit to Paris and the Salpêtrière in October 1885 deeply influenced Freud's medical career as Ellis' Parisian expedition in 1884 influenced his; and they both met and absorbed the teachings of Charcot, the French pioneer psychiatrist.

"In reading through the tremendous story I have outlined here one apprehends above all how mighty were the passions that animated Freud and how unlike he was in reality to the calm scientist he is often depicted..." Ernest Jones wrote in his definitive *Life of Freud*, and once again the hidden stresses and passions of Ellis reciprocated. The legend that Freud preserved a masterful grip on life sailing serenely through every difficulty, was as false as the story of Ellis' unflinching composure. "However unpalatable the idea may be to hero-worshippers, the truth has to be stated..." wrote Jones of Freud. "There is ample evidence that for ten years or so—roughly comprising the nineties—he suffered from a very considerable psychoneurosis..." So, in my belief, did Ellis. His extravagant shyness, stomach disorders, the case which will be presented for a form of impotence and something beyond impotence, are not easily

dismissed as "normal" within the commonplace meaning of the word.

In person, both were handsome men, temperamentally inclined to work in isolation, but identities crumble at this point and it is impossible to confuse the mystical abstractions of Havelock Ellis with the austerities of Freud's intellectual life. Nearly six-feet tall with a cathedral calm in his bearing, a silken white beard and magnificent head, Ellis carried himself with a natural grace, and many a visitor was left breathless by the splendour of his person when he answered a knock on the door of his impoverished Brixton flat. The voice coming from this vision was unexpected, sounding high and slightly harsh, and the handshake never went beyond a limp and uncertain clasp. There was something feminine in the beauty of Ellis' face. Its soft, gracious lines unmarked far into life were partly the result of the poet in him, partly inborn graciousness and partly the deliberate cultivation of an open countenance. He would study his face at length in the mirror in an attempt to anticipate and remedy any premature hardening. Behind the wonderful presence there were many mysterious forces of which among his close friends he made no concealment. It seemed absurd that a man who had brought living to such graceful perfection should suddenly unbend and admit that appalling indigestion made public life a torment.

WITH Freud it was all very different. The power of his presence gave the illusion of height to his person but he was in fact barely five feet seven inches. His flashing eyes and fine moustaches added a panache quite alien to Ellis. Less feminine, more virile, and capable of a ruthlessness quite beyond Ellis, Freud was destined to grow into normal family life with several children and a conventionally devoted wife. He followed a path remote from the tortured labyrinth which engulfed Ellis who married a woman with Lesbian tendencies, had no children, and watched his wife slip towards lunacy.

The motives which drove Freud and Ellis away from normal medicine into sex psychology differed as widely as their developing family backgrounds. In so far as his own doctrines allowed, Freud could be said to be gripped by intellectual curiosity and the excitement of medical discovery. Happily married, there was no *evident* sexual disturbance to drive him into tortured investigations of sex. Inspired by Charcot's description of his method—"to stare at the facts over and over again until they spoke to him," he developed his technique of free associa-

tion from Charcot's principle of catharsis and became deeply interested in the famous case of Anna, whose psychoneuroses were violent and unnumbered. At no stage did pathological preoccupations fire Freud to investigate his own personal sexual problems.

Something very different was true of Ellis. Bewildered by savage contradictions between his own sexuality and the moral codes of Victorian England he was just sixteen years old when he solemnly averred that unravelling the mysteries of sex would become his life's work, and it is difficult to believe that this happened by accident. Certainly another and far more convincing case can be made out which begins, classically, back in those early days of family life, when Ellis, like many homosexuals, was forced into a one-sided relationship with his mother, his father, a captain, spending long years at sea. Four sisters were added to the family over the next few years and no brother. The intensity of his mother's erotic reactions towards him are recorded by Ellis in his own autobiography, *My Life*. In young manhood his nature and temperament bore all the signs of that soft femininity, lacking normal aggression, which might have resulted from a completely feminine upbringing. If, as modern psychology believes, we are all, in some degree, bi-sexual, every accident of environment in childhood coincided to develop that potential in Ellis, and in early manhood he found the company of homosexuals sympathetic, becoming close friends with Edward Carpenter. With the appearance of the woman he first loved—Olive Schreiner—"who, in my humble opinion [writes Françoise Delisle in *Friendship's Odyssey*], refused a lover relationship with him because he was not sufficiently virile. . . ." she may have taken the place of his mother and rendered normal relations difficult if not impossible. He also told Olive Schreiner "something" which he could not even bring himself to record in his private diary. When he came to marry Edith Lees, complications of a more serious kind supervened. Mme Delisle believed that "... his wife Edith . . . prevented him from asserting his virility and thereby maimed it for years—it might have been for good." It seems more likely that Ellis' lack of virility merely brought to light Edith Lees' innate Lesbianism. Mme Delisle who lived with Ellis for many years wrote in *Friendship's Odyssey*, of her own relations with him: "... On the first day I foolishly expected the marital act I had so far known. . . . There was, therefore, a slight dread when this did not happen. . . ."

Acknowledging the chief character in his wife's novel *Seaweed* (a miner rendered impotent by accident) as himself, Ellis added fresh links to a chain which achieved greater

certainty from this phrase in a letter to Mme Delisle. . . . "But there is not one to whom I am a real lover. I don't ever want to be . . . as a lover or a husband you would find me very disappointing." Hugh de Selincourt's evidence followed, and as a man who knew Ellis intimately for twenty-five years it cannot easily be brushed aside. It became profoundly ironic for one who wrote so much of the necessity for reproducing the right kind of people, not to reproduce himself.

So it was that Ellis was driven to investigate not merely the nature of homosexuality, but the whole gigantic pattern of sexual behaviour, the contradictions of his own nature becoming the wellspring of his life's work. Speculation about repressed homosexuality is an easy indulgence but if Ellis did not suffer from this over-fashionable complaint there were certainly many occasions when his virility could be called in question.

WITH such divergent motives, Freud and Ellis broke into the conspiracy of silence about sex which choked investigation in the late 19th century. Breuer and Freud's preliminary paper, *The Psychological Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomenon* (1893), said that hysteria was not the result of heredity or degeneracy but of psychic trauma. Expanded into a book (*Studien über Hysterie*, published in 1895), it made available to the medical world Freud's discoveries and the techniques he practised. In those difficult days when Freud's approach was still under attack, Ellis in Volume One of his *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* endorsed some of his conclusions and anticipated others. He endorsed the part played by sexual emotions in hysteria—indeed he traced clear origins of the theory back to a French physician, Charles Lepois, who flourished in 1618—and saw some aspects of religion as derivative from sex. "It would be easy," he wrote, "to bring forward a long series of observations, from the most various points of view, to show the wide recognition of this close affinity between the sexual and the religious emotions." A wealth of evidence followed from the early Christian Fathers and Aquinas to Spurgeon who pointedly remarked in one of his sermons that ". . . by a strange, yet natural law, excess of spirituality is next door to sensuality."

Ellis did not claim religious sexuality as a discovery of his own. A literary scholar of incomparably greater range than Freud, he acknowledged the priority of Swift's "Discourse Concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit" in which a similar relationship was clear: "Persons of a visionary devotion, either men or women, are, in their complexion, of all others the most amorous. . . ." Beyond sexual influences

in art and religion, Volume One described infantile sexuality, and it is a moot point who was first in this field. Time and again the dating becomes very subtle and it might be worth investigating the month as well as year but for the fact that both men would have shrugged their shoulders at such pedantic niceties.

Providing some of the sources from which Freud built his mighty postulates, Ellis did not share what he regarded as Freud's monosexual view of the universe, and it is interesting that he appeared to misinterpret Freud from the outset. He wrote in the *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*:

"The sexual impulse is not the sole root of the most massive human emotions, the most brilliant human aptitudes—of sympathy, of art, of religion. In the complex human organism, where all the parts are so many-fibred and so closely interwoven, no great manifestation can be reduced to one single source. But it largely enters into and moulds all of these emotions and aptitudes, and that by virtue of its two most peculiar characteristics. . . ."

It was, Ellis continued, "the deepest and most volcanic of human impulses," but unlike the nutritive impulse, "the only other human impulse with which it can be compared," sex may "to a large extent, be transmuted into a new force capable of the strangest and most various uses. . . ." Nowhere, so far as I could trace, did Ellis acknowledge that Freud, too, saw the need to eat as an instinct no less fundamental than sex, a point ironically obvious to the veriest layman.

In the end, of course, Freud's main work was based on his own cases but for the moment he took considerable heed of Ellis. In 1899 Freud was forty-three; his father had died a few years before, and his monumental work *Die Traumdeutung* (The Interpretation of Dreams) was about to appear. In 1899 Ellis was forty; his father still lived, but two volumes of his *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* were launched and another half-written. Each man was aware of and interested in the work of the other.

On January 3rd, 1899, Freud wrote to his friend Wilhelm Fliess:

". . . A pleasing thing which I meant to write to you about yesterday is something from Gibraltar, from Mr. Havelock Ellis, an author who concerns himself with the subject of sex and is obviously a highly intelligent man, as is shown by his paper in the *Alienist and Neurologist* (October, 1898), which deals with the connection between hysteria and sexual life, beginning with Plato and ending with Freud. He gives a good deal of credit to the latter, and writes a very intelligent appreciation of *Studies in Hysteria* and later publications. . . ."

Close on the heels of what was chronologically the second volume of the *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, came another important essay from Ellis entitled "The Stuff that Dreams Are Made Of." It was important because it appeared almost simultaneously with Freud's monumental *Interpretation of Dreams* in 1899, and revealed, once more, unconscious identities in the paths they pursued.

Intuitively aware that somewhere at the heart of every dream lay mysteries which might reveal untold psychological secrets, Ellis had kept a record of dreams from the days of his medical studies, and steadily worked his way through a mass of recorded material. His attempts at interpretation had points of coincidence with Freud's, but their general approach differed widely. The study of dreams, Ellis wrote, "reveals to us an archaic world of vast emotions and imperfect thoughts," anticipating (according to Houston Peterson) Freud's principle of primitive patterns in dream thinking. "The psychic activities that are awake most intensely are those that sleep most profoundly," was again pure Freud. But there, very largely, coincidence stops, and Freud, sweeping away into grandiose concepts, enters a different order of thinking from Ellis and leaves him still fumbling with the facts incapable of those brilliant imaginative flights which eventually humbled Breuer himself.

CORRESPONDENCE between the two men began in the late nineties.* Freud wrote to Ellis on June 27th, 1912. The letter is in the Yale University collection.

It revealed that Freud had a portrait of Ellis on the wall of his study and admitted that when Freud came to return the compliment and search for a photograph to send Ellis, some small touch of vanity made him reject the picture he found, in favour of an old plaque which he thought a better likeness. It was interesting to find the Master admitting a suspicion of vanity in his ruthlessly scientific outlook.

In the same year came *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*, the introduction to which commented on "the remarkable volumes of Havelock Ellis..." Thereafter there were recurring acknowledgements to the work of Ellis, and presently Freud wrote:

"Havelock Ellis, in an appendix to his study on the *Sexual Impulse* (1903), gives a number of auto-

* All the Freud letters are under copyright, and we have unfortunately been unable, with one exception, to obtain permission to publish those messages to Ellis or even to quote directly from them.—Ed.

biographic reports of normal persons treating their first sexual feelings in childhood and the causes of the same. These reports naturally show the deficiency due to infantile amnesia; they do not cover the prehistoric time in the sexual life and therefore must be supplemented by psychoanalysis of individuals who became neurotic. Notwithstanding this, these reports are valuable in more than one respect, and information of a similar nature has urged me to modify my etiological assumption as mentioned in the text."

This assumption was one of Freud's early statements of infantile sexuality when he said that no seduction was necessary "to awaken the sexual life of the child" and "that such an awakening" could arise "spontaneously from inner sources." Ellis had already come to this conclusion in a paper, *The Alienist and Neurologist* (April 1898) where he coined the term autoerotism subsequently adopted by Freud. There followed some exchanges on the root causes of homosexuality, with Freud stressing "the acquired nature of the condition," and Ellis claiming that not enough attention was paid to innate disposition.

Havelock Ellis, Freud said, frequently found "a diminution of sexual impulse" in the inverted and even stated that some "slight anatomical stunting of the organs" could be detected. If this was so, it did not occur often enough "to be considered preponderate" and we had to recognise that "inversion and somatic hermaphroditism are totally independent of each other." Freud then confessed that psychoanalysis had not yet given a full explanation of inversion, but it was clear that he had thrown more light into its complexities than Ellis. He repeated that in every case examined by him he found that persons who later become invert went through a childhood period "of very intense but short-lived fixation on a woman—usually on the mother."

THE exchanges between the two men entered a different phase with the appearance of Ellis' book, *The Philosophy of Conflict*, which contained a remarkable statement about Freud. Whether he overstrained the indebtedness Freud had already acknowledged, or whether ("unconsciously") the threat of the psychoanalytic school drove him to exaggerate, is not clear. Certainly he was now becoming aware of the danger that Freud might outstrip and overwhelm him. At all events, in *The Philosophy of Conflict* he said that the third volume of his *Studies* had encouraged Freud to persist in

"the task he had already begun of pushing back the sexual origins of neuroses to an even earlier age, and especially to extend this early origin so as to cover not only neurotic but ordinary indi-

viduals, an extension of pivotal importance, for it led to the Freudian doctrine becoming, instead of a mere clue to psycho-pathology, an alleged principle of universal psychological validity...."

This seemed to Freud gross exaggeration. It was one thing for Freud to "modify" his "etiological assumption...in the text" and quite another to see this as the beginning of "an alleged principle of universal psychological validity...." It was one thing to say that Ellis inspired Freud to follow a path of universal consequence and quite another to imply that without his inspiration, Freud's work might have remained "a mere clue to psychopathology."

But Ellis was in a critical mood. He went on to complain that the Freudians had perverted the term auto-eroticism derived—he did not go so far as to say stolen—from his vocabulary. When Freud first adopted the term in 1905 he "accepted its chief significance in the fairly legitimate sense of a sexual impulse which was not directed towards other persons but found its satisfaction in the individual's own person." Later, it was used "to indicate a sexual impulse which not only found its satisfaction within the individual's own person but was actually directed towards his own person...." This extension was, for Ellis, only to be described as *Narcissism* and had nothing to do with the original term. In his view, auto-eroticism derived from words like automobile, which meant "moving *by itself*," and not in the sense Freudians used it, "*towards itself*."

In turn, Freud complained that Ellis had himself misused the term

[he] spoils, however, the sense of his invented term by comprising under the phenomena of auto-eroticism the whole of hysteria and masturbation in its full extent....

A tremendous solemnity marked the exploration of these subtleties. The dividing line between solemnity and conceit is sometimes narrow, and there were moments when a hint of ironic humility might have placed the whole dispute in a better perspective. Neither showed signs of such concessions.

More direct charges followed. Ellis revived the infantile-sexuality dispute and accused Freud of exposing his whole position "to quite unnecessary attacks." The diffused sexual visions of the child were, he repeated, of such a different kind, as to be quite distinguishable from those of the adult.

"The leader's confused mistake has been followed by a sheep-like flock of Freudians, who have thereby copiously aided the unnecessary indignation of their opponents."

The incest-complex had long troubled Freud

and Ellis, and the publication of Freud's *Totem and Taboo* brought this issue to the surface again. Both knew their Westermarck: "that an innate aversion against sexual intercourse exists between persons who live together from childhood, and that this feeling, since such persons are as a rule consanguineous, finds a natural expression in custom and law through the abhorrence of sexual intercourse between those closely related." Ellis largely supported Westermarck but disputed its instinctive character. "For persons who have grown up together from childhood, habit has dulled the sensual attraction of seeing, hearing, and touching," he wrote, "and has led it into a channel of quiet attachment, robbing it of its power to call forth the necessary erethistic excitement required to produce sexual tumescence."

This of course was nonsense, and Freud summoned Sir James Frazer to demolish Westermarck and Ellis at one blow. "... It is not easy to see," Frazer had written, "why any deep human instinct should need to be reinforced by law. There is no law commanding men to eat and drink, or forbidding them to put their hands in the fire. Men eat and drink and keep their hands out of the fire instinctively for fear of natural not legal penalties.... Instead of assuming, therefore, from the legal prohibition of incest that there is a natural aversion to incest, we ought rather to assume that there is a natural instinct in favour of it." This seemed unanswerable.

FROM a mosaic of sources—papers of William James, letters of Freud, talks with Ernest Jones, Ellis' own correspondence—I have pieced together the next stage of the differences between Freud and Ellis with difficulty, because access was denied (at least for a time) to some of the more important letters. For the most part, these exchanges combined scientific calm with vigorous exposition, and rarely fell into anything resembling bitterness. But there was never, in any sustained sense, a close personal relationship between the two men; their interchanges maintained that edge of classical detachment which pleased both, with very long intervals between one book or paper, riposte or argument.

A different note appeared in 1920. Early in that year Freud wrote what appears to have been a long letter to Ellis complaining about certain comments in *The Philosophy of Conflict*, and although destruction overtook the letter, it did not, to judge from Ellis's reply, preserve their usual amity. Ellis wrote (April 15th, 1920) saying what was already apparent, that the *Philosophy of Conflict* had not been written as a technical paper and had indulged a certain literary licence.

If Ellis' mood was an approximation to penitence, there followed a review of McDougall's *Outline of Abnormal Psychology*, which was tantamount to an open attack on Freud. "... It has been the unfortunate fact that at an early period Freud became the head of a sect, on the model of those religious sects to which the Jewish mind has a ready tendency to lend itself, as the whole Christian world exists to bear evidence." A description of the troubles Freud encountered, Ellis wrote, had "lately been written by Dr. Stekel, with all his profuse and complacent candour, and it is a distressing narrative. Almost from the first all those adherents of Freud who, following the example of the master, displayed original vigour and personal initiative in development were, one by one, compelled to leave the sect, when they were not actually kicked out." Freud did not like this very much. Stekel, accepted by Ellis as a conventional analyst, he regarded as a wild cat; whatever he wrote was suspect.

Ellis' review in the periodical *Forum* resulted in a flurry of letters (McDougall, Freud, Francis Wharton, Hirschfeld, Wittels, and others), and a triangular correspondence developed between Freud, McDougall, and Ellis, each exchanging confidences about the other. In one of these letters, Ellis made a sustained attempt to show that Freud was really an artist, not a scientist, and repeated what he had already said in some other contexts, that no man could be a great scientist without qualities which were indispensable to the artist, profound imaginative insight being characteristic of both.

MANY years later Ernest Jones talked to Freud about this letter, and he recalled how amusingly plausible Freud had found it. According to Jones, Freud said in his reply to Ellis that he had toyed with the idea of writing a novel (or, more accurately, a story), and if story-tellers were artists then he supposed, to that extent, he might be one; but it was, of course, not really so. Many stories kept coming into his mind as a young man, and an Oriental one he had deliberately developed in some detail. However science would keep breaking in, and despite the ingenuity of Havelock Ellis' reversal of the facts he could not believe that his work had anything to do with art as such. He regarded imaginative writers as very valuable colleagues, and some were granted powers of penetration which dispensed, in certain special instances, with the laborious inquisitions undertaken by the psychologists, but there were times when he wished that they understood the principles of scientific verification better because he sometimes found very false statements delivered with the authority of an oracle.

Havelock Ellis continued to press home his analysis of Freud as "an artist" among his English friends. This was curious. Always regarding himself, with deep satisfaction, as an artist, Ellis seemed to find it necessary to see Freud in exactly similar terms. Why? Was it because he desired to identify himself with the man who showed signs of solving, one after another, the sexual problems which still baffled Ellis? At last he wrote to Freud again, and Freud replied.

His letter recalled that Ellis had last described him as an artist and when Freud replied that he was not, a long silence had ensued. Freud took it that Ellis' regard for psycho-analysis had suffered a set-back as a result of this correspondence, but now, after a considerable interval, he had written again—to Freud's pleasant surprise. The world was small, Freud said, and human relationships unexpected. It pleased him to know that Ellis knew his followers James and Alex Strachey. The letter concluded that signs of old age were now leaving an inescapable mark on him.

In the following year Freud wrote another letter to Ellis, dated September 12th, 1926.

Ellis had sent Freud a copy of a biography lately written about himself, a biography which strung together a series of facts on a thread of eulogy. With considerable charm and no sign of irony, Freud indicated in his letter that he could not quite visualise himself revealing so much of his private life to a biographer, but the book fulfilled a long felt need and he found himself turning the pages, consciously or unconsciously, looking for resemblances. One at least he found. Both men appreciated the picture of St. Hieronymus in his study and Freud had long possessed a reproduction which hung on the wall of his own work-room.

Reading the biography of Ellis, Freud overcame the irritation aroused by the *Forum* essay and drew the conclusion that it was sometimes valuable to cut across lines of conduct laid down by habit or even principle. But Ellis was, he said, a very different person from himself; his all-pervasive kindness did not belong to Freud. He found so many burdens, so many activities weighed heavily on him and it was a pleasure to read about a man who enjoyed what seemed to be such a full, various, and harmonious life. The letter drew to a close with several references to Freud's cancer of the jaw and said that with no likelihood of the cancer spreading, he would have to discover another exit from this world.

ELLIS had, for some time, talked of completing the supplement to the *Sex Studies*, and in the winter of 1926-27 he did at last pro-

duce another volume which led to the final clash with the psychoanalytic school and Freud.

The limpid prose, the recondite learning were still very evident, but a new note ran through some chapters of the book, a note which bordered on querulousness. To put the matter plainly, the sweeping success of Freud had at last revealed limitations in his own work which, until then, had remained in doubt. In the seventh volume there were many niggles about Freud, and it quickly became clear that Freud's success had driven Ellis to query every possible statement from the Master. Consistent with Ellis' resistance to a monosexual view of the universe, the new volume restricted sexual motivation, but it would have received better reviews if the alternative case had been more convincingly argued.

In the chapter, "The Synthesis of Dreams," a picture emerged of a man clinging to outmoded convictions, advancing sometimes tortured, sometimes naïve justifications for views which technical advances had superseded. Was it that Ellis' mind had stiffened in the mould of his early thinking and he could no longer adjust himself to the swift revolutions of modern psychological thought? Or did he feel that to admit the validity of these philistine Freudians was to contribute to his own obsolescence?

The seventh volume provided Freudians with a key-word which some now used against Ellis—"failure." Ernest Jones stated that he could not be said to have made any real contribution to the science of sex. Worse still it was now evident, Jones said, that when Freud successfully achieved the aim which Ellis had set as his own, it was too much even for his noble nature, and he thereupon set himself a new aim: to prove that rival claims were unwarranted.

Ellis had much to his credit. Unlike Freud, he enjoyed another life in literature as critic, essayist, and stylist, and it set him high above the average English sex-psychologist and won him acclaim in Europe and America. As a sexologist, down the years he had pieced together an encyclopædia of sexual behaviour unmatched in the world, and if his attempts to organise the evidence were not nearly so successful as Freud's, he drew upon literary sources quite unknown to Freud. In England he had broken down the conspiracy of silence about sex, a tremendous feat under the formidable gaze of Her Imperial Majesty Queen Victoria, but his insight into motive was far less profound, and he could not match the imaginative brilliance which carried Freud beyond all commonplace frontiers. As a technical psychologist he was far behind Freud. As a scientist he applied the scientific method without Freud's powers of interpretation. As an old-world philo-

sopher, remote from the austerities of logical positivism, there were times when his grasp of the human situation seemed less narrowly conditioned than Freud's, and a sense of universal wisdom distinguished much of his work. As a human being he outshone Freud, living a gracious life of saint-like tolerance in circumstances which might easily have broken any other man.

When the seventh volume appeared he was in a state of great emotional anguish. His wife had died many years before, old age was coming down on him, and another woman of great moment to him was involved with another man. His powers of detachment were strained; there were times when the philosopher aware of all-the-wisdom of all-the-ages appeared powerless in the grip of an engulfing love and agonised jealousy. After publication he was depressed by the poor reception of the book and the few serious notices it received.

FREUD and Ellis remained in touch with one another, and correspondence broke out afresh early in the summer of 1928.

Freud wrote a melancholy letter. He had received Ellis' latest book and added it to his collection, he said, but what was the point of continuing to build a library at his age? He went on working, simply because patients could not be neglected, but the freshly accumulating data had ceased to respond to the old spontaneous constructions. He said that if he were alive he would not overlook Ellis' next birthday.

In March 1930 Freud sent Ellis a copy of *Civilisation and Its Discontents*—a book which he did not settle down to study for some time. In May of that year another letter came from Freud [in the Ernest Jones' collection]:

My dear Friend,

I thought you would be interested to read the following description of the relations between the psychiatrist and the writer:

"A writer should, so it is said, avoid any contact with psychiatry and should leave to doctors the portrayal of morbid mental states. In reality no true writer has ever heeded this precept. The portrayal of the psychic life of human beings is, of course, his special domain: he has always been the forerunner of science, and thus of scientific psychology too. For the borderline between normal and what are called morbid mental states is, to some extent, a purely conventional one; furthermore, it is so fluid that probably every one of us oversteps it many times in the course of a day. On the other hand, psychiatry would be making a mistake were it to try to confine itself permanently to the study of those severe and melancholy afflictions that result from coarse disturbances of the delicate psychic apparatus. . . . Therefore the writer can no more shun the psychiatrist than the psychiatrist the writer, and

the poetic treatment of a psychiatric theme may be perfectly correct without any loss in beauty."

I trust you are still in reasonable health.

Ellis replied to this letter saying, in effect, that he could not agree more. A gap of four years followed and then, unexpectedly, in 1934 Ellis returned to the attack in *My Confessional*. It was unfortunate that Freud and "some other psychoanalysts" sometimes showed "a malicious pleasure in trying to give an evil aspect to human impulses" and "regarded hate as a primary motive and love as a secondary derivative." This was not easy to understand from the evolutionary point of view, Ellis said, since "the reverse order would be far more plausible . . . the human animal, so defenceless in early life, with an infancy of such unparalleled length (or only paralleled by the elephant) could not survive unless bathed in a perpetual atmosphere of love."

When at last Ellis began to read *Civilisation and Its Discontents*, his qualifications about the book were immense. It was a book which saw man's attempts to realise happiness continually frustrated by three major forces, the hostility of nature, the ageing and decay of the human body, and the appalling complexities of human relationships. It was a book which analysed the substitute gratifications so many people pursued in the hope of deceiving reality, some turning to alcohol, some retreating into mysticism which bought peace at the price of blunted instincts, some into the world of art, and some accepting the mass delusion of religion. Even love itself, wrought upon, clotted up, brought to an artificial pitch of consistency, was likely to become yet another surrogate. How (Freud asked) did all this come about? Why was it so tragically necessary that a large part of the human race could only face life armed with one or other of these magnificent self-deceptions? His answer was coldly realistic. The why and the wherefore of human existence was beyond our comprehension, but those boundaries we had so painfully uncovered, pushing back the romantic clouds amassed by our ancestors, told us that life was a harsh struggle and in the long view a tragic struggle, unrelieved by anything resembling divine compassion. Man stood on the summit of a colossal achievement. Man was supreme in all forms of life. But the spectacle revealed by his long climb out of the slime was overpowering in its icy majesty, and the chill of *knowing*, of facing the long chain of pitiless peaks, was only exhilarating if it brought forth a certain brand of courage.

Inevitably the five surrogates were not, for Ellis, completely valid. Drink, he agreed, was a deplorable and petty form of escape, but the ageing of the human body need not be tragic,

and the Indian summer of life was physically so much more serene and undemanding, as his own physical self now bore witness. As for "mysticism," he smiled whenever he read Freudian references to it. They didn't understand; they didn't realise how artificial were the boundaries they imposed on themselves; how different from Yoga or the teachings of Lao-tze was his own ability to yield to "the oceanic feeling" which the analysts so accurately described and grossly misinterpreted. They should give more attention to Russell's book *Mysticism and Logic* and to the indefinable mysteries of the *essence* of personality.

So it was with love. Where Freud stripped away what, in one sense, was a mask, to reveal the contorted features of hate, Ellis believed it possible to penetrate beyond *temporary* hate to another level of love, differing only from the first by achieving greater depth. But human relationships? There Ellis largely accepted Freud's strictures for he knew only too well what appalling anguish could disrupt the most serene and apparently permanent ties.

IN 1938 the Nazis marched into Vienna to find a frail old man of eighty-two, the inside of his right jaw eaten away by cancer, a man who had survived fifteen operations in fifteen years, sitting at his desk in the house which had been his home for forty-seven years. The Gestapo called. His books were burnt, his money confiscated, but Sigmund Freud was too old and frail to concern them much further. Under persuasion from Ernest Jones, Freud boarded the Orient Express on June 4th, 1938, and two days later a fragile death's-head figure, dressed almost gaily in a green hat and green top-coat, walked with the aid of a cane into a house at Hampstead. One of the first things he did was to write to Havelock Ellis. He wished, he said, very much to see him. Ellis replied on July 14th, regretting that it was very difficult for a permanent invalid to arrange a meeting. Later, mutual friends explained the situation more exactly to Freud.

They never did meet. The two figures who had so deeply contributed to the moral revolution which each desired to bring about, were now within a few miles of one another but facing death. Freud, with the cold courage of the complete scientist, refusing any alleviation to the pain of cancer beyond the pitiful relief of an occasional aspirin; Ellis dominating a throat disease which was slowly killing him, with a detachment which did not break down for ten years. It was said that Freud's handsome face and cool eyes seldom revealed the agony he underwent. So it was with Ellis. Both men died with a rationalist's disdain of death.

NOTES & TOPICS

Thomas Mann and the “Domestic Perversity”

FOR once an author welcomes the usually so tiresome temptation to comment on a review of his book, and I am grateful to the editors of ENCOUNTER for asking me to do so. I should like to think that I am accepting the invitation entirely for Thomas Mann's sake. As far as my own authorship is concerned, I can only express my sincere appreciation of Mr. Goronwy Rees's courtesy and generosity, and of the restraint he exercised in not allowing his judgment of my book to be affected too much by the formidable doubts he entertains about the moral and literary status of Thomas Mann.

I am, alas, familiar with the truly awful problem raised by Mr. Rees. No, I don't think it is improper to ask his questions. I ask them myself; and I could not help asking them in *The Ironic German* because they are the tragic inspiration of Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*. Mr. Rees writes:

What Mann achieved was not victory itself, but the semblance and appearance of victory, and he was able to do this only by dissembling and evading the real nature of the little “domestic perversity....”

I wish he had not said this—not because it denies victory to Thomas Mann: he himself knew only too well that he lived in an age which rendered literary triumphs utterly questionable. This was the reason why he let *Doctor Faustus* be written by an imaginary writer who, on his own confession, could only be defeated by the task imposed upon him. The ironic device of the fictitious narrator, I said, never had weightier implications. For by making Serenus Zeitblom, the humanist and pedagogue, tell the demonic tale—in a style formed by its customary devotion to the liberal arts and now hopelessly overstrained by its alien purpose—Thomas Mann declared that the theme was out of all proportion to the traditional means of literature. Serenus Zeitblom, I wrote, is the novelist's offer of abdication, the *nom de plume* of silence. Clearly, there is no offence in Mr. Rees's denying victories which are not claimed.

But that “little” in Mr. Rees's sentence! Irony

with a vengeance! Does he seriously wish to suggest that the German catastrophe meant little to Thomas Mann? That his answer to Buchenwald was a smile? If it makes sense at all to expect a literary answer where such a full stop was put to all literary questions, then it is true to say that Thomas Mann's response was “ironical.” But the irony was not of the kind suspected by Mr. Rees. It was both more simple and more terrible: namely, the irony of being a writer in an indescribable world. This is the meaning of *Doctor Faustus*, of the artist's pact with the Devil. It is with his help alone that Leverkühn, the artist of the story, dares to defy the eclipse of art. Without this perverse inspiration he would remain paralysed by his own sense of truth which persuades him that the artistic manipulation of illusion has become irrelevant, or even frivolous, in the face of suffering. For having been deserted by the suffering God and His promise of redemption, agony no longer permits the lie of meaning with which the play of art molests and mocks it; only its “undisguised and untransfigured expression,” Leverkühn protests, may still be permissible. And so he sets out to “revoke and un-write” the Ninth Symphony.

Of course, there is irony in his “un-writing” it with a musical creation: *The Lamentation of Doctor Faustus*, composed, as it were, in defiance of its own text which culminates in the Devil's injunction: “Be silent, suffer, and abstain, of thy ill lot to none complayne!” And yet this paradox of silent agony issuing in music moves its first listener to ask whether it might not have its correspondence in a religious paradox—

that out of irremediable desperation might rise a vestige of hope. It would be the hope beyond hopelessness, the transcendence of despair—not its betrayal, but the miracle that passes belief.

This is how Thomas Mann smiles at Buchenwald; and this is also why I think Mr. Rees is wrong in implying that I have recommended the *gaya scienza* of Joseph as “the artist's answer to all the other bloodthirsty sciences which so successfully rule the world.” Certainly not; for there can be no “artist's answer.” More than once I said, and often implied, that the bloodthirsty sciences have established a “truth” which, by its very nature, is unanswerable by art. For there are worlds which, in the cruel literal sense, do not bear contemplating. To behold them with that fineness of sensibility, which is the condition of art, would blind the eye of the beholder and for ever cripple the aesthetic faculty. “In the end,” wrote Thomas Mann in *Doctor Faustus*, “art throws off the appearance of art,” and I added that it “may be forced to