

Occasional Notes.

HAVELOCK ELLIS.

WE feel it our duty to call the particular attention of our readers to the biographical portrait of Havelock Ellis, depicted by Mr. Houston Peterson, which was published on September 11.*

The book is founded mainly upon Ellis's published works, unpublished notes written by him during his youth, personal letters from him to the author, written answers to specific questions put to him by the author, and a commentary on the author's manuscript before publication. In addition, the author has had the inestimable advantage of many interviews with Ellis since he first met him in 1925, and has also gathered much valuable information from Ellis's relatives and personal friends.

The result is an intensely human document, in which is laid bare for our contemplation and uplifting the soul of a man with a noble purpose in life, from which no sort of persecution or obloquy could turn him, such was his conviction of the righteousness of his mission and of its enduring benefit to suffering mankind.

The life of Havelock Ellis as thus revealed, and as we have for long viewed it, has been a tragedy, not for him, but for those to whom he made his appeal.

He rests serene and content, having set alight the lamp of science in a territory for long held secret by social "taboo," where human suffering existed side by side with sin and degradation, and from which the wayfarer turned away in real or affected disgust. Ellis blazed a trail through it along which the physician and his satellites can pass without let or hindrance, and thus rendered possible the purging of this morass from its slime and filth.

No, the tragedy is for us to have allowed the spirit of the Scribes and Pharisees of old, religious prejudices, false modesty and prudery to blind us to the genius, humanity and pure motives of this truly great man, and in place of encouraging and rewarding him, to have either damned him with faint praise or cold neglect.

* *Havelock Ellis: Philosopher of Love*, by Houston Peterson. George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1928. Demy 8vo. Pp. 432, with illustrations. Price 18s.

There is yet time to restore our self-respect and make amends. If we fail to respond we may yet find ourselves erecting monuments, with tears of compunction, to one whom in the flesh we stoned.

As an Association we did in 1923 what we could to repay the debt psychological medicine owed to Havelock Ellis, poet, physician and psychologist, by electing him an Honorary Member. May we not as individuals use our influence with medical science generally to bestow on him some signal evidence of appreciation of his pioneer work in the almost untouched field of sexuology, and of unqualified admiration of all his strivings to place it securely within the domain of science?

Nobody can read this book of Houston Peterson's without feeling the justice of our appeal. For this and for its real merits as a literary production of the highest order we hope that it will be widely read. It shows Ellis's humble beginnings; his strivings as a teacher, medical student and physician; his realization of his mission in life and the circumstances which led to it; the buffetings of his soul by temptations and questionings; his periods of despair and self-abasement; his conversion to the gospel of beauty in nature; his victory over self and his dedication of himself to the cause of truth; his ultimate triumph in the field of humanity; all depicted with the delicacy of touch of the true artist.

Readers in every walk of life will find this book of absorbing interest. To study it is the duty of every physician.

J. R. LORD.

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY INSANITY.

FROM THE WRITINGS OF THOMAS SYDENHAM (1624-1681).

It is mainly through his description of chorea that Sydenham is known to the present generation, but he was a keen observer of the ills of the flesh, and his views on insanity may be of interest to those concerned in its treatment. He had a fashionable London practice in the years of the English civil wars, and his *Medical Observations* were upon cases which he began to record soon after 1660.

The present City of Westminster was then very different, and the swamps of St. James's seem to have been a fertile breeding-ground for malaria-bearing mosquitoes. Sydenham seems to have believed that malaria was a cause of insanity, for he wrote as follows (*he is discussing the complications which follow the intermittent fevers*): .