

MR. ELLIS'S PARTING SHOTS

By Henry B. Fuller

ANNOUNCING this third volume of excerpts from his journals as the final one, Havelock Ellis, civilized, cultured, old, unhappy, the despairing well-wisher of a difficult and disappointing world, seems to intimate his retirement. "I have accommodated my arrangements to Death", he declares; and he would appear not unwilling to go.

The twentieth century — no wonder, perhaps — has proved too much for him. Bellona has dealt a dreadful stroke. He is as set against those who take war medals as against those who give them. His favorite period has been the age of Louis XIV — he is all for its "splendid exuberance and extravagances". That day, supplemented by the age of Elizabeth, with its "wild turbulence and humorous eccentricity and magnificent tragedy", quite satisfies him: since the seventeenth century, he maintains, there has been no great age. He indeed appears to accept Elie Faure's estimate of Napoleon as a great artist, a lyric poet in real life and a supreme dreamer. Yet while man is "for ever crushing within his heart all the tragedy and comedy of his long career, to express from them an essence of beauty", still our diarist is unable to apply this criterion to his own age. Such, apparently, must be the work of some

younger man, aided by the idealizing cooperation resident in time. Mr. Ellis has sometimes been called "modern", he says; but there is nothing he desires less. "Some day, perhaps, our own Georgian Age will seem worth remembering. Heaven knows for what!" Possibly such an attitude characterizes rather the man who takes it than the period in which he is living.

Yet this damnable day of ours yields interests and pleasures. Art addresses us; and nature; and the stir of travel is active through the four years the present volume covers. One may fly to Paris, with its poignancy; one may sojourn in Athens, or at least recall such experiences. One may find the sea and the mountains in Cornwall and on the Riviera. One may run up to London for Elizabethan revivals or for the canvases of the Tate Gallery. . . . But a few notations, made decimally, will indicate the range of the present pages:

Page 10. — Bach compared with Beethoven.

Page 20. — Caliban and Ariel as opposing sides of the English character.

Page 30. — The Herd Instinct, as displayed during the Great War.

Page 40. — The dance of the sea — the play of waves and foam.

Page 50. — The landmarks of Cornish fields, with their phallic appeals to the generative sources of nature.

Page 80. — The long course of Egyptian culture.

Page 100. — The absurdity of the world as a spectacle.

Page 150. — Pain as the very texture of love.

Page 200. — Obscenity as a necessary element in genius; and the song and plumage of the birds. . . .

It is regrettable that this long continued series of comments and impressions should close on a harsh note; but it is probably unavoidable that one who writes frankly on almost all topics should here and there find himself misunderstood. We must remember

that Mr. Ellis began as a physician, and that while the profession always has set its feet on the firm ground of normality it has occasionally allowed them to wander off into the sliding muck of abnormality. The medico will sometimes touch on dubious topics — as in the above tabulation, which was entered upon with no thought of coloring the outcome; in which case sympathetic understanding may fail. Thus the last page of all records our author's indignation with the Canadian police inspectors who have lately been prosecuting somebody or other for "selling certain books in which I feel a very personal interest". So there it is.

However, the generous and unprejudiced reader will prefer to end on a note of his own. He will not fail in appreciation of an alert mind acutely concerned through a wide range of vital interests — a mind dedicated to right and beauty, attached to the things of the spirit, and desirous of the best in a world of imperfections. Every advanced society produces such natures, and sees to it, in the end, that they shall be unhappy. Our own day would seem to be especially apt in that regard.

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