

Correspondence

SIR AUBREY LEWIS'S COLLECTED WORKS

DEAR SIR,

The recent publication of the two volumes containing a selection of Sir Aubrey Lewis's papers has been warmly welcomed by all senior staff members of the Bethlem Royal and Maudsley Hospitals who have worked in or in association with the Department of Psychiatry of the Institute of Psychiatry. This thoughtful tribute from the junior staff of the joint hospitals has enabled a wide audience to savour the unique blend of clinical wisdom and historical perspective which Sir Aubrey has brought to so many aspects of his subject. How widely his writings have been appreciated is attested by the several reviews which have appeared, not only in the medical press but also in such journals as *The Times Literary Supplement* and *The Economist* which do not usually concern themselves with psychological medicine.

It was, therefore, with some dismay that we read the less than generous notice which has appeared in the major psychiatric journal of this country (*Journal*, January, 1968, p. 127). Your reviewers are, of course, entitled to opinions of their own, just as your readers are entitled to their opinions of the views of your reviewers. Experienced readers will neither request nor need guidance from us. It is, however, just possible that less experienced readers may have persevered with the review so far as to come across the pronouncement in the last paragraph—"One could not recommend a young doctor who thinks of taking up the discipline to read *The State of Psychiatry* as an introduction. It might put him off for two hundred years." The justification for this remarkable statement (which must surely stimulate any young doctor of mettle to rush to the forbidden volume) apparently resides in a nihilistic quotation chosen from Goethe's *Faust* to convey the message of Sir Aubrey's work. Professor Stengel's conclusion is the more surprising in view of his sobering comments on the progress of psychiatry in his R.M.P.A. Presidential Address of 1966.

We would substitute from your reviewer's literary source a more profound and more appropriate comment: "*Es irrt der Mensch, so lang er strebt*" ("... Man must strive, and striving must he err"). No one who contemplates the current psychiatric scene dispassionately can fail to discern the wide gap which yawns between present aspiration and recent achievement. It has been Sir Aubrey Lewis's particular

contribution always to encourage the former while never over-valuing the latter. His example has been invaluable to a generation of British psychiatrists in which we are glad to include ourselves.

R. H. CAWLEY, B. COOPER, J. E. COOPER, D. L. DAVIES, W. G. DEWHURST, G. EDWARDS, G. FENTON, M. GELDER, T. C. N. GIBBENS, P. GRAHAM, R. HOBSON, A. ISAACS, F. KRÄUPL TAYLOR, A. LISHMAN, E. MARLEY, F. POST, C. RASHBASS, G. F. M. RUSSELL, M. RUTTER, M. SHEPHERD, D. STAFFORD-CLARK, W. WARREN, J. K. WING.

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DEAR SIR,

I refer to Professor Stengel's review of the republished works of Sir Aubrey Lewis (*Journal*, January 1968, p. 127).

I have been asked by the Common Room, which I represent, to point out that the decision to publish these two volumes was taken unanimously by the Junior Common Room of the time, independently of the Senior Staff of the hospital. This would hardly have happened if the "young doctors" concerned had been "put off for two hundred years" by reading the contents of the books.

J. P. WATSON.
Chairman.

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DEAR SIR,

According to the recent review in the *Journal* of Aubrey Lewis's selected writings, Sir Aubrey can do no right. His monumental work on melancholia—the most detailed and thorough clinical study of depressive illness in the English language—is dismissed as "unexciting". Professor Lewis is castigated because he "can hardly claim the credit... (for having)... saved British psychiatry from a narrow psychodynamic orientation"—a claim which Sir Aubrey has never made. Even his "polished and restrained style" is "depressing", because the reviewer, with an unerring eye for the irrelevant, feels that the words did not flow easily from the pen. *Between Guesswork and*