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The Book Table

Edited by EDMUND PEARSON

The Letters of Sir Walter Raleigh¹

Review by FRANCIS de N. SCHROEDER

SIR WALTER RALEIGH, the Sir Walter Raleigh whose letters have just been published, died at Oxford on May 13, 1922, sixty-one years of age. He was born in London, the fifth child and only son of Dr. Alexander Raleigh, a Congregationalist minister and author of devotional works. He went to University College School in London, taking his B.A. from University College in 1881, and that autumn he entered King's College, Cambridge, an enthusiastic youth, six feet six inches tall and particularly thin. Here he played golf for the University, became President of the Union, and, reading history in a very desultory fashion, missed a First in the History Tripos, and graduated at the head of the second class with a young man by the name of Austen Chamberlain.

Leaving Cambridge, he accepted a position as teacher of English literature at the Anglo-Indian College of Aligarh, in India. He was there for two years, until bad health forced him to return to England. They were two years that he never forgot, strengthening the love of strange places and strange people that was his through life. In England he married Lucy Jackson, only daughter of the then editor of the "Illustrated London News" (who has prepared these volumes), and held in succession the chair of English Literature at Liverpool, Glasgow, and Oxford.

The war was the turning-point in Walter Raleigh's life. His three sons were in it from the start, and a month later he himself was drilling and marching with the Territorials, in the interval of lectures and pamphlet writing. It is no marvel that the war impressed him so; the man would be something less than human who could live through those years so close to the middle of things and think as he did before. The wonder is that he could see so clearly and think so straight at that time. In 1915 and 1916 he was writing things about the Germans, without favor and without hatred, that we, cooling off for eight years, realize are true. He was as proud as a peacock when, in 1918, the War Office chose him as the official his-

torian of the Royal Air Force, and from then until his death the Air History was always in his mind. In 1922, when the first volume had appeared, he fulfilled one of his earliest ambitions, and went to Bagdad by airplane. On his return to England, six weeks later, he was not well. Possibly from the water of Bagdad, possibly as a result of a forced landing in the desert, sleeping four nights under the plane, waiting for relief, he contracted typhoid fever, and on May 13 he was dead.

That is the story of Sir Walter Raleigh, new series. His well-meaning parents had burdened him with a great name, one of the greatest in English history. To-day people are beginning to realize how well he lived up to its responsibilities. He was fortunate in his friends. From one of them, Mr. H. A. Jones, who helped him with the Air History, I shall copy this short description:

I shall remember him best pushing open the door. He always came in the same way. A gentle tap, a slight fumbling with the handle, and the door would open and he would be there, slightly bent, because of his great height, a smile of welcome on his fine face, the collar of his inside coat sticking out above his outer coat. He would pause for just a moment as if to take in the occupants of the room, and then he would come quickly forward to shake hands, and at once his rapid, witty, bubbling conversation would flow. You listened amazed. Barely had you caught one choice bit of wisdom before he was off on another. He seemed to await you with his next effort. As it shaped itself in his mind and fell almost at once from his lips he would sometimes look at you, hold you with his eyes for a second as if to say, "Are you getting that? I'm getting it!" And then when he saw you had, you would both break into laughter. He stood, it almost seemed, on one side and enjoyed with you his other self.

It would be vain to attempt to reconstruct his conversation. His gestures, the moods which passed across his face as he spoke, the play with his enormous pipe—all these are essential. He would be talking. The pipe is out. Out comes a box of matches. He strikes one, and applies it to his pipe. As the flame touches the bowl a thought strikes him. The thought will not keep. Off he goes into conversa-

¹The Letters of Sir Walter Raleigh. Edited by Lady Raleigh, with a Preface by David Nichol Smith. 2 vols. The Macmillan Company, New York. \$7.

tion, holding the match until he is reminded of its presence when it burns down to his fingers. He strikes another, and the same thing happens again. After he had sat smoking and talking in the office for a morning, the grate would be full of charred match ends, silent derelict victims of his bubbling thoughts.

He might want to illustrate his anecdotes. Before one realized the fact he was off up and down the room in martial stride, showing his idea of the goose-step, or else he would dive for his hat to show the type of headgear that his wife considered inadequate to the dignity of a professor about to visit Egypt.

But to return to his letters. Talk, then letters, then books, is the way he graded his own enthusiasms, and these letters are very near to his conversation. Open either of the volumes at any page, and there is something that you will want to read aloud.

In 1918, for example, a petition is sent him for signature suggesting stringent rules restricting the consumption of alcohol by undergraduates. He makes this reply:

I was sorry to get your circular.

I have been fourteen years in Oxford, and have seen a great deal of the undergraduates in the Colleges.

Drunkenness is rare, and is well dealt with by a decent public opinion among the men themselves. There is less excess than there was at Cambridge when I was an undergraduate, and that was very far from being habitual or general or scandalous.

I cannot think it wise to ask the resident members of the University to adopt rules drafted for them by a body of petitioners the bulk of whom are neither responsible for the discipline of the Colleges nor well acquainted with the life of the undergraduates.

A certain amount of freedom to go wrong is essential in a University, where men are learning, not to obey, but to choose.

Thousands of the men whose habits you censure have already died for their people and country. Virtually all have fought. Why is it that when the greatest mystery of the Christian religion comes alive again before our eyes, so many of the authorized teachers of Christianity do not see it or understand it, but retire to the timid security of a prohibitive and negative virtue? Your petition is an insult to the men who have saved you and are saving you.

In 1888 he describes a seal-hunting expedition to his wife in the following terms:

And so find ourselves coming up through a trap into a dark cavern. It is essential that the swimmer shall be

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armed with a heavy club and a candle. He lights the candle and peers about for seals; if he finds one he intercepts its escape and clubs it.

Mr. Strachey objects to the adventure. In the first place, he says justly, that the seal is a gentle, pleasant animal, and that to intrude into its private drawing-room in scanty clothing and strike a light in order to brain it is bad taste, beside being an unpleasant business. Moreover, he cannot see without, or swim with, spectacles. There is further a considerable uncertainty as to how the seal behaves when assaulted. Bogey says he grubs up earth in the face of his assailant and then breaks his back with his tail.

Again we find him writing to Lady Desborough, mother of Julian Grenfell, during the war on the news of Julian's death. It is interesting to remember that Julian Grenfell was a direct descendant of the Sir Richard Grenville who fought the Spaniards in the little Revenge, and that it was the other Sir Walter Raleigh who first described that battle.

Words are no use; the live glorious complete thing that is a splendid human history is too much for them. It's over, but there is some standard other than our feeding and breathing, or even than our memory; and if we could only see it, nothing has perished. Our weakness cries for comfort, and I dare not think how you will learn to do without Julian day by day. But I love to think how lightly he would talk of his own death, if we could hear his voice.

Occasionally he got riled.

I have been reading Schofield on Medieval Lit. It makes me cry. These schoolboy books by bright students won't do. He has not read the books he talks about. He tries to stun criticism by exhibiting a scrap-heap of machinery. It's all very sad. His English is sloppy. He was begotten by a thesis on an endowment, and is now teaching pupils how to write worse books of the same kind.

So much for Professor Schofield.

But let that suffice. These quotations were chosen by the simple process of sticking a paper-knife into the book and seeing what turned up. There are plenty more where they came from.

There are indications that Oxford is going to make a Great Man of Walter Raleigh, and how he would have hated it! The prize essay for this year will be written on the theme of Sir Walter Raleigh and his place in English criticism. There will be much talk of his "Milton," his "Shakespeare," "English Novel," and "Some Authors," and the

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undergraduates will probably play him for an odds on favorite against Matthew Arnold and Macaulay. There is even a chance that in time he may become such a stuffy literary figure as the latter. These letters can save him. They can keep him human in the eyes of all good men better than any formal biography ever could, and they must be read. They must be read in America, above all, for in our colleges and universities there are too few men of his type.

He was an adventurer as truly as was his Elizabethan namesake, though the accidents of life made him an adventurer of the mind. For twenty-five years in the English universities he led the way and the young men followed. Teaching literature, he used to say, was like teaching swimming—pupil and teacher must bathe together. Sir Walter Raleigh never once held the pose of Moses giving the law to the Hebrew children, so popular in American colleges.

And if young men idolized him, he was always the first to defend them from the prematurely old. You will remember his famous reply to those who complained of the behavior and lack of discipline of young aviators during the war. "The Romans tell us," he said, "that it is sweet and decorous to die for one's country. In that decorum the Service is perfectly instructed." Sir Walter Raleigh was something of a writer and a good deal of a teacher; he was particularly a gentleman. It is good to read of such men.

Fiction

FLAPPER ANNE. By Corra Harris. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston. \$2.

A lovely flapper is thrown by fate into the Southern home of her grandmother, a sweet old lady of the old type and a dignified figure in the old-fashioned society. The things that follow are amusing and startling. Anne loses her heart (not, we must say, in a quite convincing way) to a worthy doctor of extreme anti-flapper convictions.

THE LOVE NEST, AND OTHER STORIES. By Ring W. Lardner. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York. \$1.75.

The author of "You Know Me Al" presents nine short stories with an introduction by Sarah E. Spooldrigger, elderly spinster, confidante and p. g. of the Lardner family. Miss Spooldrigger helped to keep the wolf from the door, and she was with the late Mr. Lardner during his fatal attack of conchoid, "a disease which is superinduced by a rush of seashells to the auricle or outer ear." An editorial note states that Miss Spooldrigger herself has passed away, being found in the garage two months ago, "her body covered with wolf bites left there by her former ward, who has probably forgotten where he left them." The stories, written in Mr. Lardner's entirely original style, would not, most of them, fit into the academic formula of what constitutes a short story. However, situations are developed interestingly. He digs beneath the false front of appearances to expose the laughable pretensions of a Broadway manager (a not unfamiliar type), or describes the pent misery of a little screen actress married to a motion-



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