

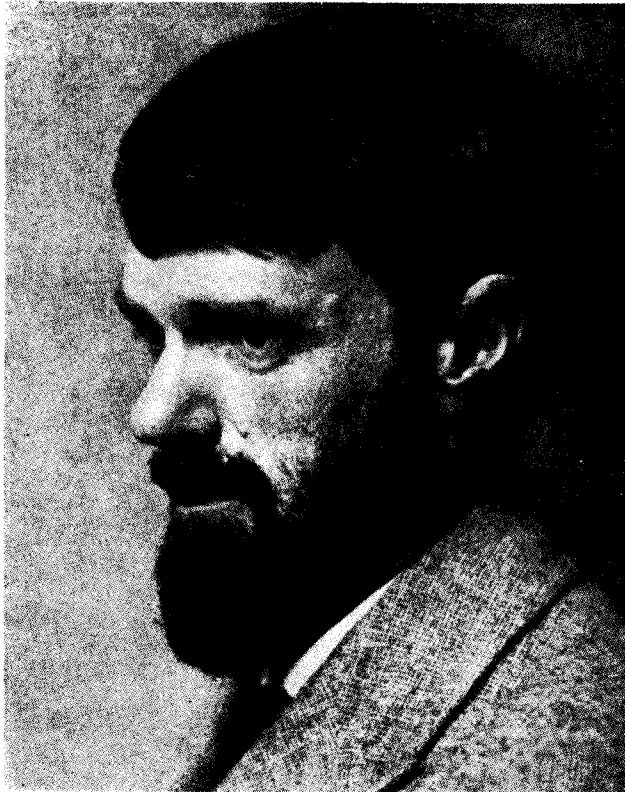
D. H. Lawrence: Ten Years After

BY RICHARD ALDINGTON

N EARLY ten years have passed since the death of D. H. Lawrence; and more than ten years since I last said good-bye to him, with no suspicion that I should never see him again. True, during the eight or nine weeks we had been together, he had been seriously ill; but then he had been ill so often, yet had always recovered. It seemed as if some mysteriously inner vitality triumphed over sickness. Actually there was a physical basis for this. Recently I talked with the doctor who attended Lawrence in his last illness. From him I learned that, although the lungs were badly scarred, there was still plenty of resistance, and he would have survived even then but for the psychological defeat which had destroyed his will to live.

I propose here only to relate the outline of this tragedy—the inner complexities need a long essay. Lawrence, it must be remembered, was a striking personality. The books published about him show the almost fanatical devotion he aroused in his own inner group. I have never been able to see why this was the occasion for so much sneering. On the other hand, little or nothing is said about the equally fanatical and far more extensive hatred developed against him. I have often been astonished by it, and still am. People who had never even seen Lawrence, to whom he had done no harm, who had merely listened to gossip and given a prejudiced glance to one or two of his books, united to disparage and thwart him in a way which virtually amounted to persecution. It is to Lawrence's credit that he never developed persecution mania, though he was aware of this hatred, deeply wounded by it, and naturally rather resentful.

It is a peculiar situation. Here was the son of a working man who, through his mother's determination and self-sacrifice, received enough education to become an elementary school teacher in a London suburb. Since his father could barely read and



D. H. Lawrence: "There are not so many great figures in twentieth century England that it can afford to despise any of them" . . .

write, that was already an achievement. But from that he went on to make a world reputation as an imaginative writer, with no resources beyond what he could earn with his pen, and in spite of ever-growing opposition. Nothing very criminal in this, one would suppose.

From the beginning an odious class snobbery came into action. Lawrence was condescendingly patronized by the London intelligentsia as a worthy sort of inferior who ought to be glad to receive their superior instruction. His early books were handled pretty roughly by the London journalists while they praised forgotten mediocrities. There was some Pecksniffian grumbling about what was called his "eroticism," and this became virulent when he eloped with a married woman, who subsequently became his wife. In spite of or perhaps because of malicious gossip, his third book was a success. But in September 1915, a year after the outbreak of war, his fourth novel, "The Rainbow," was successfully prosecuted for obscenity and or-

dered to be destroyed. The book contains one paragraph with a faint suggestion of female homosexuality (so faint that I didn't see it until it was pointed out to me) and several chapters expressing disapproval of war. British magistrates love to insult authors and artists, and the defendant never has the ghost of a chance. The so-called "trial" is invariably a farce, as the judge refuses to admit any witnesses for the defence.

A few weeks after this trial I was surprised to receive a copy of a report issued by the London "Public Morality Council," which among other activities sends old women to previews of films to shorten the kisses and cut out the underclothes. The Bishop of London was an active supporter. My subscription to this association of sex-starved spinsters was demanded on the grounds that they had been responsible for getting "The Rainbow" suppressed.

These people know nothing about literature and are nothing more than smut-hounds, but they still continue to function.

The Lawrences were ruined at a stroke by this. No royalties, naturally; and then no British publisher dared issue a novel by Lawrence until after the war. It would have been unpatriotic. The Lawrences took refuge in a tiny cottage on the north coast of Cornwall, for which they paid about a dollar a week and even then nearly starved. You would think they were harmless enough.

Lawrence was rejected by the army as totally unfit, and by way of doing what he could worked on a farm. But Mrs. Lawrence was a German by birth; and sitting by the fire at night

Next  Week

CHANGING STANDARDS
IN FICTION

By MARGARET CULKIN BANNING

WOODROW WILSON: VOL. VIII

By RAY STANNARD BAKER

Reviewed by Raymond J. Sontag

they sometimes sang German folk-songs. Suddenly the military descended and searched the house, carrying off Lawrence's papers. All the papers were subsequently returned as harmless; but the Lawrences were ordered to leave Cornwall. Apparently they had been accused of showing lights to guide non-existent German submarines into the Bristol Channel! Lawrence, who of course was utterly and entirely innocent, could never be made to see that mistakes like this do occur in war-time. Nor did he realise that the French at that moment had the jitters about spies, and had insisted that the British government take action against all suspicious characters.

Things did not rest here. Towards the end of 1917 the Lawrences stayed at the same house in London that I used. I had been back some months from the front, and had just passed my final examinations as an officer-cadet. I came into the house alone at dusk one evening, and found a strange man on the stairs. I asked him what he wanted, and to my amazement I found he was a detective sent to spy on Lawrence, and probably to arrest him. I spent over an hour with this sinister dumbbell trying to persuade him of the absurdity of his suspicions. Thanks chiefly to the fact that I was in uniform, I think I succeeded for the moment. Naturally, I didn't tell Lawrence about it—with his capacity for moral indignation he might have done something rash. So far as I know, he was not further troubled by spy-hunters during the war.

Curiously enough, at exactly this time another Lawrence was actively employed as a British agent in Arabia—a strange coincidence.

In 1919 D. H. Lawrence left England, and never returned except on brief visits. The official and unofficial persecution did not disappear, however. In 1922 the Lawrences were in Australia, and he wrote an autobiographical novel of their experiences called "Kangaroo." In one chapter of that novel is a vivid description of Lawrence's fury and disgust when a hitherto friendly Australian turned up to inform him sneeringly that he was—a spy! Where had the man got this interesting information?

For the next three or four years the Lawrences were in America, and in no way troubled by this sort of thing. In 1926 on their return to Europe I saw them again, when they stayed in their home near Florence. In 1928 "Lady Chatterley's Lover" was printed in Florence, and was immediately prosecuted. Opinions may differ as to the merit of that work, but I think

any decent person would have been revolted by the columns and columns of swinish abuse of Lawrence published in the British press. I happened to be with Lawrence when these cuttings arrived, and saw how outraged he was. The truth is that he never had the least intention of writing a pornographic book. He had lived so long away from ordinary people that he had half-forgotten their prejudices. He felt he would soon die, and wanted to leave a testament of beauty—he rewrote that book three times. With his narrowly passionate puritan nature and incredible naïveté, he saw himself as a crusader for a saner sex life. The foul abuse of the English press was as unexpected by him as it was shocking. I have a feeling that something died in him that night when we sat



Drawing by Collier

Frieda Lawrence

reading that malevolent trash before a log fire on the island of Port-Cros.

And this wasn't all. An exhibition of his pictures was closed by the police and several of them seized as obscene. Americans who have looked at the volume of colored reproductions will know how harmless they were—practically any modern art show has equally wicked examples of painting. The incredible thing is this. A few years later, long after Lawrence was dead, I happened to pick up a copy of an obscure and short-lived periodical containing an interview with Mr. Ernest Thessiger. In this interview he boasted that he and Sir John Squire had acted as common informers, and thus compelled the police to take action. I may add that this was not under the Bodkin regime. There was a Labor government in power, and Clynes was Home Secretary.

That makes the next stage even more amazing. As I have said, Lawrence was living with me in an old fort on the island of Port-Cros, which

lies about twenty-five miles from the naval base of Toulon. The fort had been lent to me for two or three months by a French friend. It had a superb view, and French tourists occasionally asked to be allowed to see it. I invariably accompanied them, as Lawrence was very ill in bed—he had a terrible cough, and his lung had started to bleed again. One afternoon three French staff officers arrived, and very politely made the usual request. I took them to the best viewpoint, and by the merest accident mentioned on the way that I had served in the war. We had the usual veterans' get-together, and then they began asking about Lawrence. I explained that he was a very talented English author, but that the British didn't like him because he had published a book of a sexual nature. This tickled the Gallic sense of humor, and they laughed heartily, while we all got in some cracks about British prudery and hypocrisy.

Still they insisted politely but firmly that they must see Lawrence. I explained how ill he was. They went on insisting, and suddenly the ghastly truth came to me—somebody had been pitching that idiotic spy story to the French naval authorities in Toulon! Luckily, Mrs. Lawrence then arrived on the scene, and talked in her frank open way, which I am certain reassured them. At last they went away. It would have been fatal for Lawrence to see them at that moment. He hated men in uniform, and with his extreme quickness would have seen at once what they were after. His anger over the "Lady Chatterley" press clippings had started his lung bleeding again; and the shock of that interview might have killed him. The intention seems to have been to get him deported from France, and as soon as he reached England he would probably have been prosecuted for "uttering an obscene libel."

In any case mail from him to England was being opened by the police, which is quite contrary to law. An envelope containing the MS of "Pansies" was confiscated by the police during transit through the mails, and certain poems destroyed by them.

As a rule, when a man dies, his obituary notices are not stones thrown on his grave. Such was not the case with Lawrence. An obscure journalistic clown named Jimmie Douglas published two columns of illiterate abuse under the title "The End of Filth," and Jack Squire contributed a stupid and venomous insult to the dead. There were a good many others.

This disparagement by England of
(Continued on page 14)

Always Looking Homeward

THE WEB AND THE ROCK. By Thomas Wolfe. New York: Harper & Bros. 1939. 695 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by GEORGE STEVENS

This novel . . . marks not only a turning away from the books I have written in the past, but a genuine spiritual and artistic change. It is the most objective novel that I have written. I have invented characters who are compacted from the whole amalgam and consonance of seeing, feeling, thinking, living, and knowing many people. I have sought, through free creation, a release of my inventive power.

SO, in a brief foreword, Thomas Wolfe explained his approach to his third and penultimate novel—a novel that has the best and the worst of Wolfe in it. Actually "The Web and the Rock" contains two distinct novels: a first half that closely parallels the material of "Look Homeward, Angel," and a second half that is a sequel to the events recorded in "Of Time and the River." A sequel to all intents and purposes, but with Eugene Gant replaced by a new hero named George Webber. The change is principally in name; there are a few alterations in detail of background and in physical appearance; but even in ancestry George Webber's experience overlaps Eugene's, and the further the novel progresses the less distinction there is between the two. George, like Eugene, is the child of a run-down puritanical family in the state of Old Catawba; and also like Eugene, he is beset by the problem of the young man in search of a father. The web and the rock of the title are shifting symbolical images: the web of experience, of environment and ancestry in which George constantly fears to drown (the mixed metaphor is Wolfe's); the rock of the lost father, which gives his life significance. The first half of the book is George Webber's recollection of those things past which Eugene Gant forgot; the second half is the love story of Eugene, told in George's name.

If "The Web and the Rock" had been published as two novels, it would be possible to say that the first half was Wolfe's best novel, the second half his most disappointing. This is surprising, because in general the first half is repetition of what he had done before, and the second is an excursion into a new field: a passionate and tempestuous love story, into which is woven the narrative of George Webber's development as a writer and the publication of his first novel. It is the first half, also, in which Wolfe more nearly succeeded in his attempt to gain objectivity, because it is here that the character and growth of George

Webber is most in the background; many of the scenes do not involve him as a direct participant. But that is all that can be said for the objectivity of "The Web and the Rock." The significance of even the earlier events is in their emotional impact on George Webber, who stands for the author as completely as Eugene Gant ever did, and through whose consciousness Wolfe projected some of his most inspired lyrical and invocational passages. The second half, the love story, is utterly subjective throughout.

The whole question of objectivity, in any event, is a red herring. "The Web and the Rock" is Wolfe exactly as we have known him since "Look Homeward, Angel" was published in 1929; it represents no positive development of his ability; what it does, at its best, is to reveal his gifts in all their power and intensity. The first half is dominated by Wolfe's brooding observation of the dark corners of life, the fringes of human nature. It can flash through unforgettably in an anecdote—like that of Rance Joyner, great-uncle of George, a simple-minded mountaineer with the supernatural property of "appearing" at times of disaster; or like that of the Joyner brothers sitting for three days over the corpse of their father, discussing the Egyptian method of embalming; or like that of Aunt Mag and the idiot orphans whom she made her peons. It can magnificently sustain a long episode, as in the chapter about the butcher and his wife who brutalized their own children; as in "The Child and the Tiger," the story of a Negro gone berserk, who held a lynching party at bay un-

til his bullets ran out; best of all, perhaps, in a meditation of George's, "Three O'Clock," about the boys whom he feared and hated—"the dwellers in accursed streets," "the vultures of the world," "made of a vile, base, incalculably evil stuff." Scene after scene, in spite of the resemblance to "Look Homeward, Angel," is breath-taking; Wolfe has illuminated a section of experience which no other novelists but Dostoevsky and Joyce have explored more searchingly; if "Look Homeward, Angel" and "Of Time and the River" were unknown, the first two hundred pages of "The Web and the Rock" would be enough to insure Wolfe's reputation.

These are followed by a section more conventional, but still good Wolfe, on George's life at the University of North Carolina and his early career in New York; and here Wolfe introduces one of his first-rate caricatures in the obese, androgynous esthete, Jerry Alsop. Unlike what has preceded, however, this part does suffer in being too repetitive of Wolfe's earlier novels; and some of it—the arrival of the youth in the big city, "trying to find himself," the re-creation of the intellectual atmosphere of the metropolis in the early twenties—has a sort of local staleness about it which even Wolfe's most efflorescent verbiage cannot disguise.

If "The Web and the Rock" repeats in George's name the experiences of Eugene in "Look Homeward, Angel," it proceeds to skip "Of Time and the River" entirely. Half a page, in italics, tells us that George went to Europe, "knew strange countries, countless things and people, sucked as from an orange the juice out of new lives, new cities, new events. He worked, toiled,



Willard Van Dyke

The Great Smokies (from "Land of the Free" by MacLeish: Harcourt, Brace)