

# RAF COLLEGE CRANWELL

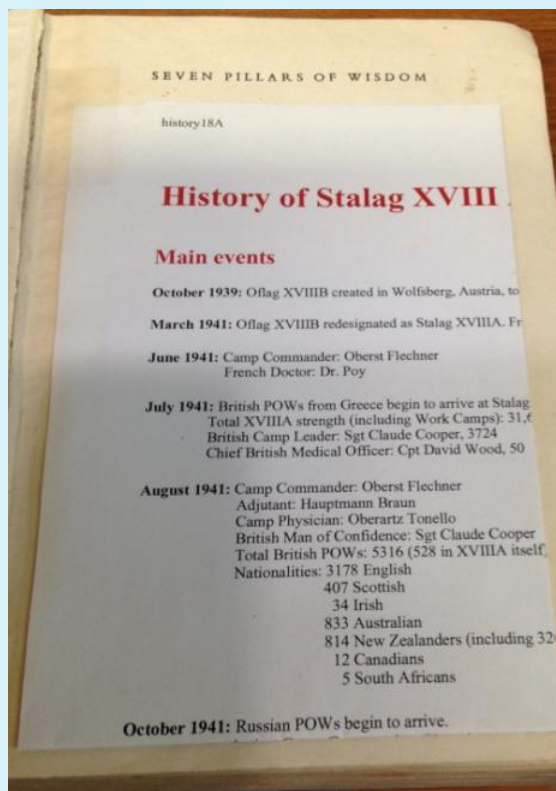
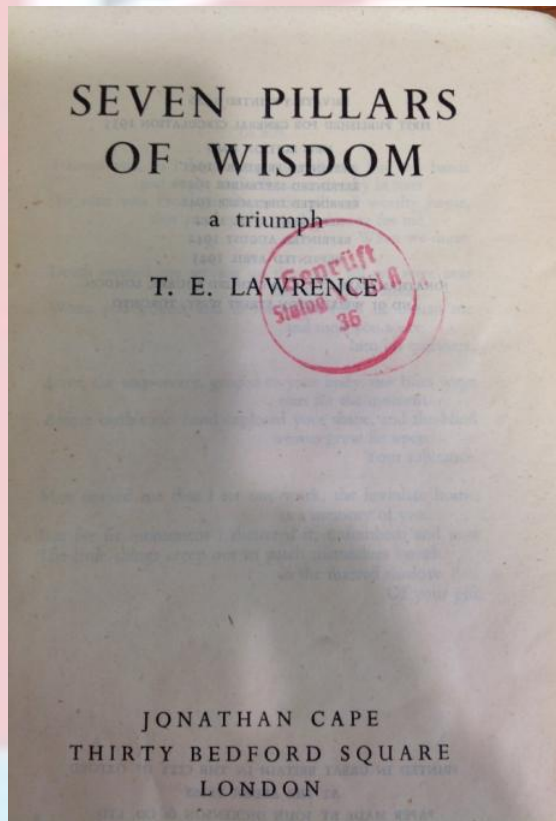
## TE Lawrence



a.k.a. Aircraftman Ross & Aircraftman Shaw  
RAF Cranwell 1925 - 1926



# College Library - TE Lawrence (aka AC Shaw)



The "Lawrence Room" is named after Col TE Lawrence (AC2 TE Shaw) or Lawrence of Arabia. TE Lawrence was stationed at RAF Cranwell as AC2 TE Shaw" 1925-1926. It was whilst he was stationed at RAF Cranwell, that Lawrence wrote "*Revolt in the Desert*". He also presented a hand annotated proof copy of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* to the College Library which remains in the collection today. If you go up the stairs, on your right, you will see a model of part of the men's accommodation and the then SHQ. This was made in 1934.





# Autumn 1935 - College Journal Lead Article (1)

## One great man talks about another

### AIRCRAFTMAN T. E. SHAW

#### A LAST CONVERSATION.

BY PROFESSOR R. D. L. B.

1925 I HAD known Colonel Lawrence on and off for thirteen years. He served at Cranwell about 1922-27 as an aircraftman, and he paid me a long visit at the College only a few weeks before his death.



(With apologies to Mr. Eric Kennington).

We all knew who he was when he served at Cranwell, and most officers and airmen respected his incognito. We knew that he did not wish to mix with officers, because he wanted to avoid what was still at the front of their thoughts, and to forget certain beastly or painful experiences which are recorded in his great book. He was happier in the light-hearted conversation of young airmen who had not known the dangers and discomfort of war. We bade him "Good morning" when we passed him, but we never discussed anything. We used sometimes to consult him on Service topics, but we always treated him as an airman.

He once took of his own free will a most interesting part in a course I was giving to officers on Imperial Geography, and gave a discourse on the Middle East which will not be forgotten by those who heard it.

Once or twice when I wanted his advice on a point of scholarship I used to write him a note. He would send an elegant reply, and when he was writing "The Seven Pillars of Wisdom" he sent me the printer's proof, in which I drew his attention to one or two small errors. There is in the JOURNAL a facsimile of a letter in his fine writing in jet-black ink, in which he allows me to reproduce an extract from the proof.

I remember that this proof had been roughly bound by Lawrence himself, and on the outside he had mischievously written a title—"The Complete Aircraftman." This book he afterwards presented to the College Library. We bound it more suitably. Though anyone may read it, and many officers and cadets have availed themselves of the opportunity, we have insured this book for £250, and we keep it under lock and key. It is valuable, being unique owing to the amount of autograph in it.

In general, the text of the book is remarkable; it is more intimate than "The Revolt in the Desert." It was written by Lawrence in a room at Leadenham, and is in the manner of Doughty, Burton and Philby, having that mastery of English which the desert seems to induce.

At Cranwell, Lawrence served in "B" Flight and was of great assistance to F./Lieut. Green, his Flight Commander. He was indeed The Complete Aircraftman. His kit was always scrupulously clean, brightly polished and neatly turned out. In the Flight-Office he was responsible for the tidiness of the room and the lighting of the fires. He kept the

log-books with meticulous care, to the joy of the Flight officers, and he never shirked a fatigue. He was always scrupulously correct in his demeanour, and I have seen him cheerfully sweeping out the Officers' Mess after a dance. I have also seen him, during the interval in the morning, carrying about six cups of tea to his fellow-airmen, a bit of conjuring done without that strain on his face habitual to conjurers and ventriloquists.

Indeed, the things which I remember about him best were his conspicuous health and good cheer, which were an answer to those who rebuked his lowly status. I used to see him swinging along the road with a young orderly, the picture of happiness, both men at ease and talking hard. It was amusing to think that an Aircraftman and a Fellow of All Souls should have so much in common. But Lawrence had something in common with everyone, and he entered the ranks just as in mediæval times many learned and successful men entered a monastery, or an Order like the Templars.

He rode a speedy motor-cycle and went at a dangerous rate. His motor-cycle—a gift, I believe, from the manufacturers—was a Brough Superior. On this bike he nearly killed himself while he was here, but was not at all perturbed. Indeed he made a remark to his rescuer which showed what little store he set by his life. Another day, in cranking a car, he broke his wrist, but without a word of complaint to the owner of the car he went off to our hospital and was treated by Wing-Commander Huntley. As soon as the Wing-Commander's back was turned, Lawrence walked out of the hospital, much to the alarm and despondency of the staff. The reason he gave was that he could not stand the constriction of a ward a minute longer; he suffered from claustrophobia, and wanted to return at once into the open air, and bigger rooms.

After Lawrence left Cranwell, I did not see him for some years, although we exchanged a number of letters, all of which I have kept and treasure, except those which I have reluctantly given to my friends. For these letters have that air about them which have preserved letters in the past. Most letters go to the waste-paper basket after a week or two, but others are self-preserved. Lawrence's letters are beautifully written in jet-black ink, and are delicately phrased, and there is always something rare in their message and in the words which convey it.

Some years ago I was having tea in my quarters with a party of cadets, when, to our pleasure and surprise, Lawrence came in. He just said, "You know who I am," and told us he had just come up from Bristol non-stop on his motor-bike.

I hurriedly ordered from the Mess some fresh food, and indeed gave him a very good tea, as he was famished and very thirsty. He became most cheerful and talked to us at length, and with much range and precision, about his ideals in classic art. He must have been with us about an hour and a half. We talked about the figure of Queen Nefertiti in the Berlin Museum, and we asked him what he thought of Epstein's work at St. James's Station. He replied that, although these sculptures were ugly out of their context, they were appropriate in a cubist building.

During the next years I continued to correspond regularly with him,



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and I frequently consulted him in connection with the JOURNAL, for which he wrote anonymously more than one article. One of the last articles he sent me after I had written for it, was a remarkable translation of the Odyssey. I wrote to him urging him to begin the translation of the Iliad, partly because he was the man for such a task, and would have produced something worthy, and partly because I thought he might need the money. His rendering of the Odyssey was in a volume *de luxe*, sold at about £15 a copy. I could not afford it myself, but by the generosity of the author and the publishers, I was given the loan of it for a fortnight, and was able to show it to many officers and cadets, who took pleasure in the elegance of the text and the beauty of the type. The book was afterwards on view in the British Museum, as a specimen of British book-making at its best.

Lawrence told me that he always devoted a whole day to ten lines of translation, and that he wrote two copies of them before he made the final fair one. The secret of handling the Arabs, he said, was an unremitting study of them. A similar attitude to scholarship places the translation of the Odyssey and "The Seven Pillars of Wisdom" among the great books of the world.

The last time I saw Lawrence was last term, a few weeks before his death. It was during the morning break. My room was full of people, and as I walked towards the door talking to one of them I saw him standing humbly outside.

He was untidily dressed in ancient flannels and a coat and muffler, which had seen very much better days. I know that at least one of my visitors wondered as he passed by who was this slipshod apparition. Although I had not seen Lawrence for some time, and he had aged and lost much of his youth, I recognized him at once and had pleasure in showing him round the College, and of talking to him on all sorts of topics, for about an hour and a half.

I offered to lend him my car to show him round the station, but he would not accept. He had served here with so much happiness that he feared that a return to his old haunts would induce melancholia. I took him first to see the pictures in the Ante-Room, in the choice of which he had played a big part. We talked together of Tuke, whom we had both known at one time. Tuke is the painter of the sailing-ship scene in the first of the cadets' ante-rooms. Lawrence told me he had often been a model for Tuke in his youth; and I had watched him at his easel.

After going through the ante-rooms we went to the cadets' quarters and spoke to "Colonel" Young, who, of course, recognized his visitor, and to two other College servants whose names I cannot recollect.

Then I took him to the main lecture hall, and the library, where I introduced him to Capt. C. W. Pollock and Mr. L. E. Fisk. While he was in the library we showed him the copy of "The Seven Pillars of Wisdom." He studied this book carefully and explained to us the significance of some of the illustrations. He was a modernist in art.

I asked him why he did not re-engage in the Royal Air Force. He told me that if he signed on for another twelve years he would be too elderly for the ranks. He added with a smile that he had already reached the

giddy height of A.C.I. He said that the idea of a man of sixty being in the ranks was preposterous. I suggested that he should apply for promotion, and take the necessary examinations. He said that the educational difficulties were too great.

This was a typical remark made mischievously by a man who was an international scholar in Arabic and archæology, an unusual linguist and a Fellow of All Souls. I suppose a Fellowship of All Souls is the highest academic honour in the world.

I do not know how the train of conversation started, but presently we asked him what he was going to do to balance his budget in the future. He told us he had 25s. a week to live on, and he thought that enough for any man. I remarked that he would never be able to maintain his motor-bike on that. He replied that he was giving up the bike, and he showed me his push-bike on which he had already come a great distance and on which he was proceeding to Cambridge. I felt sorry to see him so worn and, I thought, tired.

He told me that if ever he went short of money he could always translate books from German and French. I urged him once again to translate the Iliad, and not keep his talents laid up in a napkin. We talked at some length about what he was going to do when he left the Service. He told me that he was very tired and getting old. In fact, he was 47 years of age, but there was no doubt that he was looking more tired and bleached than when I saw him last.

I asked him if he would attend our College Literary Society one evening, and I think he would have come, but he said: "For the moment I am 'other ranks' and I do not feel happy in the company of officers." But I gathered he would come one evening; as he was always interested in the College.

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So we have lost one of the great figures of the century—a man whose death was signalized by eulogies from the Sovereign downwards. For, after his death, the King, who is more conversant with facts and men than most, sent this message to Lawrence's brother: "The King has heard with sincere regret of the death of your brother, and deeply sympathizes with you and your family in this sad loss."

"Your brother's name will live in history, and the King gratefully recognizes his distinguished services to his country and feels that it is tragic that the end should have come in this manner to a life still so full of promise."

Mr. Churchill wrote of him: "I fear, whatever our needs, we shall not see his like again."

Lawrence had the qualities of great personal bravery, initiative and learning, whether he was designing a strategy or leading a charge, or digging an ancient site. He spoke with a modulated voice and with a twinkle always in his eyes. What he said, like what he wrote, had an unaffected finesse, and impressed itself on the memory.

There was no mystery at all about him. If he was a mystic he was a practical mystic. A romance about him was conjured up for young men



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and maidens by a cheap American journalist. He was one of the great men who can mix freely in all classes of society, but he preferred the company of his intellectual inferiors. He wanted rest and oblivion after the troubles, mental and physical, which he had endured in Transjordan and Arabia.

Some years ago I had gone up with some flight-cadets from our Literary Society to see Marlowe's "Dr. Faustus" at Oxford; and on the following Sunday I was at a loose end. As chance would have it, I turned my steps to All Souls' College, and when I got into the porter's lodge one of the batmen—or scouts, as they call them at Oxford—asked me if I should like him to show me round.

I accepted the offer and I found out by accident a few minutes later that he had been Lawrence's scout. After showing me all round this beautiful college, which is remarkable for having only about two undergraduates, he showed me several relics of Lawrence, including a dagger of solid yellow gold which he had given to the College, together with other mementos.

He also showed me the original of Augustus John's drawing in the Frontispiece of "The Revolt in the Desert," and told me that an American tourist had offered him £25 for it. I advised him not to sacrifice it. But what interested me most was a letter written by Lawrence, which I was allowed to read.

In it he described how he had received that day several decorations from His Majesty and, after walking across the Tower Bridge, had dropped them one by one into the Thames beyond the reach of the drag-net.

Everybody knows how as a white Arab he had hoped to build up an Arabian Empire or a succession of Arabian States, from Mecca to Cilicia; from the Red Sea to the Shatt-el-Arab; and from the coast of Palestine to Persia. He had made a number of promises to the Arabs, and had been unable to fulfil them. He had been repulsed by the policies of Sykes and Picot, the good nature of Balfour, and the sentiment of Rothschild.

He felt, therefore, that he had let down the Arabs. Whether he had exaggerated the ambitions of the Arabs by his promises does not matter: nor whether he had alienated the goodwill of the French, who, he told me, refused him a passport into any country under their control.

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While I have been in Lincolnshire I have heard so many foolish criticisms of him that I have been dismayed by the critics' lack of imagination. Many people contended that he should not be in the Service, because he would not wear any ribbons. They were obsessed with paragraph this and sub-paragraph that, forgetting that it was a distinction to have such a man in our Service in any capacity, particularly perhaps as an aircraft-hand. Besides, no one who knew Lawrence would think or say that, judged by the most utilitarian standards, he was unworthy of his pay and rank. There is no doubt that he rendered notable service to the R.A.F. in connection with motor-boats.

To critics of a higher category, particularly to historians who have the

Thank you very much. I hope you will cut out "Prince of Mecca", for that is an American invention and impossible in fact. "Emir Mekky" = Prince of Mecca, + denotes actual temporal overlordship. It could not be an honorific — and King Hussein was never in the mood to honor me. We did not get on together.

Also I was not among the first to enter Damascus; indeed my position there was very equivocal. I found an empty will amongst our leaders, when they got there — and knowing there were things urgently required I compelled them to do what I wanted. That was all.

Otherwise there is nothing which is not a fair expression of opinion. Of course I do not share your view of the literary merit of the book. It seems too literary for a memoir, + too truthful for literature. However that doesn't much matter.

The B.O.C. asked me for a copy for the C.C. library, + this I've sent him. So you will be able to look at it, when you wish.

The facts about publication are that this full text will not be published in my lifetime: but about 150 copies are going to friends of mine, without reservation: so knowledge of it will soon get about. They will be distributed in the end of November. An abridgement is to be published by Cape in March 1927 and the serial publication of 40,000 words of this abridgement can be begun by the Daily Telegraph after Dec. 15 next. So your long quotation shouldn't appear before the D.T. has had its whack. After that do anything you please. Other people will be doing the same.

T.E.S.

FACSIMILE OF A LETTER TO THE EDITOR BY AIRCRAFTMAN T. E. SHAW.



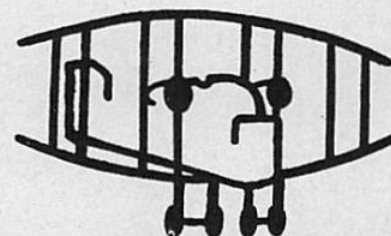
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privilege of being wise after the event, it may be yielded that Lawrence backed the wrong horse; that he should have conciliated the support of Ibn Saud, not of the frail Sharifian family; that he should not have alienated the French, nor made such generous promises to the Arabs. It may be that the Arab campaign was only a minor campaign. But these contentions, whether correct or not, are beside the point, and miss the essence of the matter and the man.

If any mystery has been conjured up about Lawrence, the mystery has been useful in this materialistic age, which requires a little mystery and romance. But those who knew Lawrence best know that there was no mystery about him; that he was just a charming man, and a great intellectual to whom nothing was difficult. He was always revealing unexpectedly some new facet of intellect. Everyone liked him and respected him. It may be that he courted publicity by his studied obscurity. But if he did, he despised himself for it; and none of us is infallible. Besides, all must be forgiven to a man who has made history. He performed exploits unsurpassed in guerrilla warfare, when he harassed and paralysed with 3,000 Arabs more than twelve times their number of Turks. He evolved a new theory of war; he substituted for concentration dispersion. He practised a kind of bloodless strategy by which he paralysed his opponent by an intangible ubiquity. All will pardon this man if he was occasionally impish, exasperating and baffling, if he encouraged occasionally an aura of mystery.

When I last saw him he was just going off on his push-bike to Cambridge. I offered again to drive him round the camp, but he seemed reluctant. I offered to get him some food from our Fancy Goods Store, but he was not interested in food.

He had a long conversation with me on the steps of the College, and I remember the last words which I said to him were urging him not to waste his life as a modern Diogenes, but to settle down again to worthy and useful work. But he just laughed in that serene, inscrutable and boyish way of his and pedalled off.



J.C. Thompson

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## LAWRENCE OF ARABIA

*(Being an address delivered by Lord Halifax in St. Paul's Cathedral at the unveiling of a Memorial to Colonel T. E. Lawrence on 29th January, 1936.)*

I TAKE it as an honour paid to the University of Oxford that her Chancellor should have been selected to perform this ceremony, and to say something about one of the most remarkable of Oxford's sons. It is my misfortune that it never fell to me to enjoy that close friendship with him, the memory of which is the possession of many here, so it cannot be of their Lawrence that I must principally try to speak. Rather from a standpoint more detached must I make some attempt to appraise the character and performance which we here commemorate.

It is significant how strongly the personality of Lawrence has gripped the imagination of his countrymen. To comparatively few was he intimately known; his fame rested upon achievement in distant corners of the world; to the vast majority he was a figure legendary, elusive, whose master motives lay far outside their cognizance. So true it is that men often admire most what they are least able to understand.

There has been no character in our generation which has more deeply impressed itself upon the mind of youth. Many of us can remember when we began to be told stories how impatiently we used to ask the teller if it was really true; and Lawrence's life is better than any fairy story. As we hear it we are transported back to the days of medieval chivalry, and then we remember that these things happened not yet twenty years ago, and were mainly due to a force present in one man, that we acknowledge under the title of personality.

To Lawrence in an especial sense Oxford played the part of understanding guardian. Trained of old to discern the signs, she readily knew in him the divine spark that men call genius, tended and breathed upon it until, self-taught, it kindled into flame. And it is perhaps not untrue to say that the discovery by Lawrence himself of his own powers and destiny was in no small measure due to their earlier recognition at Oxford by Dr. Hogarth, whom he was accustomed to describe as a great man and the best friend he ever had. So, with the stamp of her approval, Lawrence set forth from Oxford eastwards, a crusader of the twentieth century on behalf of peoples and causes which must remain for ever associated with his name.

It was an accident that this phase of Lawrence's life should have synchronized with that most searching trial of his country which was the occasion of his rendering her such signal service. He had long dreamed of the restoration to freedom of the inhabitants of Palestine and Arabia, and it was through the reactions of the Great War upon those lands that the chance came to realize his dreams. Others worked with him through the perils of the strangest warfare that those years witnessed, and share with him the glory of achievement. But he, as his collaborators were first to own, was the inspiration and fiery soul of the revolt which shattered Turkish misrule and made free men of the children of the desert.

In 1914 Lawrence was barely twenty-six, known only to Oxford and the small circle of his friends; when the war ended his name was on the lips of all the world. For nearly three years he had organized and directed against the enemy a race of nomadic tribesmen, difficult of combination in sustained military effort, and, great captain that he was, had turned what might have seemed their chief disadvantage to the invention of a new strategy. Conscious that he had at last found a cause to which he could consecrate all his energies, privation and physical danger became only incidents in the attainment of the great end of his endeavour. By true gift of leadership he was able to communicate to others his own standard of achievement. Each man who looked to Lawrence for instructions knew that he was asked to undertake no duty that his leader would not, and could not better, discharge himself. Small wonder that he could count upon a devoted loyalty almost unique in the annals of military adventure, a loyalty which over and over again carried forlorn hopes to complete success.

The campaign ended, Lawrence found himself engaged in what was for him the more arduous struggle of the peace. Even before the war ended questions, to which for him only one answer could be given, were being caught up in cross-currents of international policy and rival national interests. The mark that these days left upon him was deep and ineffaceable. The strain of their anxieties was heightened by the strain of writing his own record of events, to which at whatever cost he felt impelled by historical necessity.

Even at Oxford, where he sought in All Souls to find the rest that the University offers to her returning sons, he found himself unable to escape the burden that pressed upon his soul. Relentless his fame pursued him, forced him from Oxford, made him fly even from himself, to find in change of name, scene, and occupation that loss of identity through which he hoped to win reprieve from his distress.

Thus he came to join the humblest ranks of the Royal Air Force, the youngest of the Services. The future lay with youth, and here for Lawrence was the very embodiment of youth, with all its life before it. His imagination became suddenly on fire with the thought of what the air should be. Sharing its fortunes on terms of simple comradeship, he might inspire the young Service upon whose quality he felt that some day the safety of his country might depend. He called the conquest of the air the one big thing left for our generation to do. It is not without significance that the bulk of the contributions for the memorial unveiled to-day has come from shillings and sixpences given by the ranks of the Royal Air Force. To his decision we owe it that he was able to put into final form the narrative of those desert days, in prose which will live so long as men read the English language, and give Lawrence yet another claim to immortality.

These years from 1922 to 1934 among the unnamed rank and file were perhaps the happiest of his life. Both his mechanical and creative sense were satisfied in the work of perfecting the new speed-boats for the Air Force, and when he returned to private life it was a man restored, desiring yet doubting the taste of leisure, who went to make a quiet home for himself



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deep in the land of Wessex, beloved of that other master of the English tongue whom he so much revered. Here it was that after a few brief weeks he met catastrophe in what seems to have been characteristic sacrifice of self to avoid a collision, and a week later died.

So passed Lawrence of Arabia, leaving behind him a memory and an example. For he always maintained that he was no more than the average of his time; what he could do another might, granted the will and the opportunity.

What was the secret of the almost mesmeric power that he exerted? So different was he from other men that they could often only catch part of his singularly complex personality, and it is perhaps just in this difficulty of judging the man whole that lies the true evidence and measure of his greatness. Nor, with his strain of puckishness, was Lawrence himself averse from deepening a mystery, at times not less baffling to himself than to many of his friends. No one can read his private letters, in some ways the most arresting of his literary work, without being conscious of sharply alternating moods, almost the conflict of competing personalities.

But, this said, there are certain fixed points that hold firm in contemporary judgment. All those who knew him agree that he possessed some quality to be best described as mastery over life. While, like all men, he owed much to the influence of heredity and environment, he, more than most men, had or acquired the capacity to mould life instead of lending himself to be moulded by it. Here lay the secret of his command over affairs, over others, and last, but not least, over himself. It is seldom that the direction of world events can be so clearly attributed to the dynamic force of a single individual. He saw a vision which to the ordinary man would have seemed like fantasy, and by the sheer force of his character made it real. From his fellows he drew without exertion an allegiance unquestioning and absolute. Most men when they are asked to give are tempted, like Ananias, to keep something back, but Lawrence asked everything, and, because of the authority with which the demand was made, everything was given. Many elements contributed to the acceptance of this superiority, unchallenged and unsought. Great powers of intellect, of imagination, of intuitive understanding of other men's thought, but above all else must rank the overwhelming conviction that he gave of moral purpose.

It was not merely that he brought to bear upon life the concentrated strength of all his being, but that this faculty was eloquent of victory in the stern struggle for self-conquest. All the things that clog—ambition, the competitive race, possessions, the appetites of the natural man—all must give way if real freedom is to be won. Life, free, unhampered, unalloyed, alone deserves the name. As he said: "The gospel of bareness in materials is a good one."

I cannot tell what fed the consuming fire that made him so different from the common run of men. It has been said of him that no man was ever more faithful at any cost to the inner voice of conscience. Everything he did fell under the lash of his own self-criticism, and the praise of men

was unsatisfying and distasteful. But I cannot doubt some deep religious impulse moved him; not, I suppose, that which for others is interpreted through systems of belief and practice, but rather some craving for the perfect synthesis of thought and action which alone could satisfy his test of ultimate truth and his conception of life's purpose.

Strange how he loved the naked places of the earth, which seemed to match the austerity of life as he thought that it should be lived. And so he loved the desert where wide spaces are lost in distance, and, wanderer himself, found natural kinship with the wandering peoples of his adopted home.

His was the cry of Paracelsus:

"I am a wanderer: I remember well  
One journey, how I feared the track was missed  
So long the city I desired to reach  
Lay hid: when suddenly its spires afar  
Flashed through the circling clouds: you may conceive  
My transport: soon the vapours closed again:  
But I had seen the city: and one such glance  
No darkness could obscure."

Yet side by side with this craving to accomplish ran another strand of feeling that lifts the veil from the inner struggle which I suppose grew harder in his later years. In August, 1934, he was writing to a friend about his own disquiet: "I think it is in part because I am sorry to be dropped out. One of the sorest things in life is to come to realize that one is just not good enough. Better perhaps than some, than many almost. But I do not care for relatives, for matching myself against my kind. There is an ideal standard somewhere, and only that matters, and I cannot find it. . . ."

There we must leave it, for the waters of genius run too deep for human measure.

Lawrence himself was never free from the challenge of his nature's secret. Perhaps he came nearer to the answer during those last days when he lay in the uncharted land between life and death, and saw his life no longer in part, but whole before him. Once more, it may be, he visited the Norman castles which first in boyhood had excited his romantic sense, or walked again amid the ancient works of Palestine. Or there came back to him the vision of the endless desert, rocking in the mirage of the fierce heat of noontide, and once more he trod the dusty ways of Akaba, Azrak, and the city of the Caliphs and, last of all, his beloved Damascus, with her green gardens by the river, these fading in turn before the places of his spiritual hermitage, Henlow, Bovington, Cranwell, and the Air Force stations of India—Peshawar, Miranshah, Karachi. And before the end came, I like to think that he saw again the spires of Oxford, unearthly in their beauty, set in the misty blue of early May, until at last he reached no earthly city, but that city of his vision where he might see no longer as in a glass darkly, and know at length as he was known.