LAWRENCE-OF-ARABIA BOOK CREATES LITERARY STORM
By PETER D. WHITNEY Special to The New York Times.
New York Times (1857-Current file); Feb 6, 1955; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 20
pg. E4

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British Critics Deal Roughly With Author Who Questions Soldier's Exploits

By PETER D. WHITNEY
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LONDON, Feb. 5—It has been a long time since London has seen a literary controversy like the one precipitated by a sharply critical biography of Lawrence of Arabia, hero of World War I.

The book, by Richard Aldington, poet and novelist, has been hanging over the publishing market for more than a year. Behind-the-scenes protests from friends of T. E. Lawrence repeatedly caused the publisher to delay it.

Mr. Aldington, who has written several other critical biographies and has the Western Front trench fighter's contempt for glamorous guerrilla sideshows, accuses Lawrence of "systematic falsification and overvaluing of himself."

In 388 pages, liberally footnoted, he attempts to prove that Lawrence's leadership of the Arabs on Lord Allenby's right flank in 1916-18 was no great shakes.

Mr. Aldington also tries to show that Lawrence lied or exaggerated about his own role in the desert, the length of his camel rides, the successes of his mining parties against Turkish trains, and the influence he wielded over the Arabs.

Charges Indiscretion

He also accuses Lawrence of sexual deviation, in sympathy if not in act, of permitting or encouraging sadism and looting on the part of his Arabs, and of being indiscreet with top-secret information.

Mr. Aldington also spends a lot of time on Lawrence's youth, and claims to have found the essential clue to him in the fact that he was illegitimate. This was a fact widely known by word of mouth, but never printed by previous biographers because Lawrence's mother, 94 years old, is still alive in Oxford.

His father, Thomas Robert Chapman, was of a well-born Irish family, related to the Vansittarts. After having had four daughters by his wife, he fell in love with their governess and ran away with her. His wife would not divorce him, and she outlived him.

But under the name of "Lawrence" the couple lived faithfully together for more than thirty years, raising five boys and giving two of them to their country in World War I. Mrs. Lawrence, a strict Calvinist Scotswoman, concealed the story from the children. Incredible though it may seem, Lawrence's elder brother, Robert, a retired medical missionary in his sixties, did not know the truth until last year. But T. E. found out in adolescence.

Discovery a 'Shock'

The shock of discovery, Mr. Aldington believes, operated on a "gifted, intensely vain and susceptible youth," and left "reverberations of resentment throughout his life."

Mr. Aldington also decries the post-war Lawrence as a poseur who connived in the fabulous publicity build-up made for him by Lowell Thomas, and then denied that Mr. Thomas had got any facts from him.

Mr. Aldington says that Lawrence's book, "Seven Pillars of Wisdom," is not the great work it is widely thought to be, and that it owes such excellence as it has to the fact that Bernard Shaw rewrote much of it.

The most damning inconsistency that Mr. Aldington claims to have discovered—and the one he says opened his eyes to the rest—is the claim by Lawrence that he was once offered the post of High Commissioner to Egypt by Winston Churchill. Aldington has lost a lot of ground on this point. Since publication of the book Sir Winston has searched his memory. The Prime Minister has written to an earlier Lawrence biographer, B. H. Liddell Hart, that it is "very likely" he talked over the post with Lawrence, and that the latter refused it, as he said he had done.

Lawrence's Death

Mr. Aldington cannot even find much good in the manner of Lawrence's death. It is generally believed that he was traveling very fast, as was his wont, on his motorcycle, when a delivery boy on a bicycle wobbled across the road. Lawrence swerved, and crashed. Mr. Aldington's version is that "Lawrence ignored the salutary rule that the crest of even a shallow hill is a blind corner."

The reviewers have been hard on Mr. Aldington. The book has been reviewed by men with big names—Lord Vansittart, Randolph Churchill, Robert Graves, Sir Ronald Storrs, Sir Harold Nicolson, Capt. Liddell Hart and Raymond Mortimer. None has liked it. At best, they find it dull.

The Manchester Guardian's reviewer, John Rosselli, called it "an abusive police file," and quoted William Morris' having said about Droeshut's Shakespeare portrait that it could not look like Shakespeare because it did not look like a man. "We may say the same of Aldington's Lawrence," he concluded.

Accused of 'Sneers'

Mr. Graves, who wrote one of the admiring biographies, contended that Lawrence was not only not homosexual, but would not marry the woman he loved because he had been flogged into impotence by a Turkish punishment squad during the war.

David Garnett, who edited Lawrence's letters, wrote in The New Statesman: "Whenever I have first-hand evidence, Aldington's sneers are unjustified." He, like several other reviewers, suspects Mr. Aldington of hatred for his fellow-Englishman.

One of the oddities is that the book was published in a French translation several months before the original. Entitled, "Lawrence l'Imposteur," it differs materially in some places from the English Edition.

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