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D. H. Lawrence

TWO GIANTS and a Giant Killer

by H. E. Bates



Upton Sinclair

LENIN, Lawrence, Upton Sinclair, Frank Harris—it would be a colossal business to review, in a few hundred words, even one of these men. Like giants, Lenin and Lawrence tower too high to be measured; Sinclair, naturally volatile and perpetually at war, seems to be flashing past to some fresh conflict with hypocrisy or slavery as we attempt to buttonhole him; Frank Harris, liar, swaggerer, seducer, artist, schemer, less consistent even than a chameleon, not only defies analysis and criticism but seems, the more one reads of him, to deserve neither.

All of these books are fascinating. All reveal vividly the men who wrote them or the men about whom they are written. It is typical of Upton Sinclair to write his own life and thus ensure that for at least once in his career he shall not be misrepresented. The wonder of him is that he is still alive to do it. He confesses that as an urchin he was perpetually escaping death in city streets; his life ever since seems to have been one long repetition of those hectic and dangerous moments.

In the causes for which he has fought he has not only overworked his body, mind and spirit but he has placed himself within reach of the anger of the most powerful enemies a man could choose to have, the beef-trusts, Tammany, the slave-drivers, the newspaper-magnates, the war-mongers and profiteers of America.

His strength and stamina, not to speak of his courage and ingenuity, are astounding. As a young man he wrote for the newspapers, and it is astonishing that he did not succumb so early to the deadly business of writing jokes about mothers-in-law, serials ironically enough about military cadets, novels and novelettes of which the total number of words must have exceeded those in the works of Scott. And this before he began to take his life as a writer and reformer seriously!

When finally he did begin that life, attacking all those things he hated and still hates so bitterly—war, wage-slavery, hypocrisy, corruption, social evils, and religious cant—he had the greatest difficulty in avoiding death by the constant abuse of his physical resources and by the persecution which descended upon him from every corner of America. The very stuff which he was handling was dynamite, too. But there were so many bits of filth and humbug and cruelty to blow up that he could never rest. Now and then he tossed off a novel, a thing of hundreds of thousands of words, spent the royalties on more fighting, wrote another novel, and spent the money again.

It is impossible to read his book without admiration and excitement—admiration for his genuine and tireless genius, excitement at his bitter, relent-

less, and unending fights against the social diseases of what, perhaps, is still, in spite of him, the most socially diseased nation in the world.

Reading of Sinclair one gets the impression of a great dynamic force repeatedly exploding. With Lenin the impression of dynamic power is even stronger, but with a difference. There is only one explosion—the explosion which shook the world. With Sinclair there are many causes; with Lenin all causes were one. His whole life was one long, intense conservation and concentration of energy for a single purpose. Nothing could shake him. He trained his mind until it was a single force more powerful than all the forces he planned to overthrow—forces more despotic and greedy and selfish even than those at which Sinclair threw himself.

Maxton, in a very few pages, has conveyed this impression of power extremely well. Forgetting as nearly as



Reviewed On This Page

CANDID REMINISCENCES. By Upton Sinclair (Werner Laurie. 10/6).

LENIN. By James Maxton (Peter Davies. 5/-).

APOCALYPSE. By D. H. Lawrence. With a Preface by Richard Aldington (Secker. 10/6).

FRANK HARRIS. By Hugh Kingsmill (Cape. 7/6).

TEN CONTEMPORARIES. By John Gawsworth (Benn. 7/6).

possible his political self, he has drawn Lenin with a few bold, powerful strokes, with keen observation, and with acute but detached judgment. He has not flung himself into acrobatic attitudes of mind in order to persuade us that Lenin was, and still is, an immense figure. He has had sense enough to realise that shouting and bullying are not stronger in persuasion than truth. Having accepted Lenin himself he treats him as a subject for quiet analysis and explanation, not as a god at whose feet he expects us all to fall.

Contrast him with Lawrence. "Lenin was a Tyrannus in shabby clothes," Lawrence declares. "A man like Lenin is a great evil saint who believes in the utter destruction of power. . . . And a great saint like Lenin—or Shelley or St. Francis—can only cry *anathema! anathema!* to the natural proud self of power, and try deliberately to destroy all might and all lordship, and leave the people poor, oh so poor!"

This is Lawrence writing at the top of his voice—that thin, desperate, dying voice seeking to make us aware of some fresh light and of the truth of it. Mr. Aldington, in an acute introduction to "Apocalypse," calls the book a splendid valediction, but he takes care not to compare it with "The Rainbow" or "Sons and Lovers" with the great Lawrence who did not need to raise his

voice, who had not then become desperate and hysterical, who was, above all, content to manifest himself as a poet. The mind that speaks in "Apocalypse" is sick in spite of its intense sincerity. It believes, but it cannot convince. Words are italicised, repeated, flung into capitals in the desperate attempt to make us follow the conclusions Lawrence draws from "Revelation," but failure cries out bitterly in every line.

Like David Garnett's brief impression of Lawrence, Mr. Aldington's preface to "Apocalypse" reveals him truly. Here is the man whom both low-brow and high-brow, with their leering, sensual curiosity and their snobbish adulation, have never understood. One knows too well those who were against him:

"The Home Office with its policemen and beastly war-time spies; many of the reviewers; the huge, stupid, puritanical middle-class; and all the nasty busy-bodies who are always so busy watching and warding other people's morals."

Haven't these people, or their brothers in petty iniquity, always been the enemies of Art? It is only that Lawrence was a more easy victim than most. The capacity for suffering which comes out in every page he wrote made him so easy to hurt. His sublime sincerity made it just as easy for his words to be misinterpreted. Hurt and betrayed! No wonder Mr. Aldington's introduction has concealed in it the bitterness of an avenging whip-lash.

After Lawrence one has scarcely patience to speak of Frank Harris. It is fitting that his biography should be written by one who was once a worshipper at his feet but who has seen since that they were feet of clay. Mr. Kingsmill has no pity to waste on Harris. He treats him dispassionately, probes the sores and raw spots of his character, dissects him unmercifully. From somewhere also he has raked up some damning evidence.

There is no side of Harris that he has spared; but let it be said that he bears no malice; he is as fair as he is fearless.

Mr. Gawsworth's book, primarily intended for the collector, will also interest the student of contemporary letters. For the price of one bibliography in unnecessarily sumptuous pig-skin he has given us ten in honest cloth. His authors, among whom are Lascelles Abercrombie, Wilfred Gibson, Robert Nichols, Edith Sitwell, Rhys Davies, have all contributed original short chapters about themselves and their work. The best of these personal notes is Rhys Davies' "Writing About the Welsh," a brilliant, pungent essay. The bibliography itself is carefully and soundly done. This book ought to set a precedent for future bibliographies, which have hitherto been produced, apparently, for American millionaires.