

THE DREAM OF FAIR MEN

Peter K. Robins

Fifty years ago, on 13th May 1935, ex-Aircraftsman T.E. Shaw rode on his Brough Special motorcycle from his cottage, Clouds Hill, on Egdon Heath, Dorset, to Wool, the local town, to send a telegram to Henry Williamson. The telegram read:

WILLIAMSON SHALLOWFORD FILLEIGH
Lunch Tuesday wet fine cottage one mile
north Bovington Camp

SHAW

On the way back from Wool, Shaw came on two errand boys on bikes in a dip in the road. He swerved violently to avoid them, lost control, was thrown over the handlebars and received extensive head injuries. He lay in the small, corrugated military hospital at Bovington Camp for some days while his life slipped away. At a few minutes after eight o'clock on 19th May, T.E. Shaw, Lawrence of Arabia, was dead.

Lawrence had been part of Henry's life for some years and he had resolved to meet him:

... I first knew what sort of man T.E.L. was on reading the opening sentence of his serialized Revolt in the Desert in the Daily Telegraph in 1924, or thereabouts. I sensed a co-relation, the Conradian influence, same sort of sight and viewpoint as my own, in that one sentence. Before that, he had been vaguely, a sort of wonder-man, super-human, outside my experience. One day, I said to myself, we shall be friends. I even contemplated sending him a book of mine. Dare I? I didn't. I was obscure, unread. The flash, the intuitive knowledge, faded. Four years later, I received a long, closely-written letter, two or three thousand words, which he sent via Edward Garnett, to me, from India, about Tarka. He sensed all that was behind the writing of that book, all of it; he might have lived it and written it himself, so sure was his intuition.

Goodbye West Country

Lawrence was Henry's first hero, later he transferred his need to Hitler and Mosley. What he found in Lawrence is understandable. Both men were unable to escape their childhood: Henry with his difficult father, denying him the love he yearned for; Lawrence brought up by his strict mother, dreading the revelation of his illegitimacy. Trying to

hide their faces from a materialistic world, Henry turned to Nature, while Lawrence assumed the anonymity of "Aircraftsman Shaw" in the RAF.

After much correspondence, Henry and Lawrence did eventually meet in July, 1929, when Lawrence in pouring rain motorcycled to Skirr Cottage from Plymouth, where he was then stationed. They talked about the war and the joys of motorcycling, Lawrence boasting he had hit 103 mph on his Brough at one time on the Salisbury to Winchester road. After a simple, salad lunch, Lawrence returned to his base.

Despite further letters between them, and promises from Lawrence that he would visit Henry again, now removed to Shallowford, they didn't meet until February, 1934. Henry had been invited to Georgia and was to set sail from Southampton. They met in Henry's cabin aboard the Berengaria and by this time Henry's reverence for Lawrence had grown to such a degree that he compared him to Jesus:

Like Jesus, T.E. Lawrence had completely realized himself, he had learned the enormous value of being his true self. So his friends felt not only safe with him, but integrated. T.E. Lawrence was now an amalgam - quicksilver of youth blended with gold of a realized experience.

Goodbye West Country

A year later he saw Lawrence as a Saviour of Europe:

... for it was time something was done about the pacification of Europe through friendship and fearless common sense. The spirit of resurgent Europe must not be allowed to wither, the change to a thwarted rage of power. With Lawrence of Arabia's name to gather a meeting of ex-Service men in the Albert Hall, with his presence and stimulation to cohere into unassailable logic the authentic mind of the war generation come to power of truth and amity, a whirlwind campaign which would end the old fearful thought of Europe (usury based) for ever. So that the sun should shine on free men.

Genius of Friendship 'T.E. Lawrence'

Henry wrote to Lawrence to fix a meeting so that he could put these ideas to him, saying he would arrive 'unless a rainy day'. Lawrence's reply was the telegram.

Lawrence's own attitude to Fascism and National Socialism gave rise to considerable speculation. Liddell Hart, the military tactician and historian, told Lawrence that many people wanted him to be dictator of

England. Lawrence said that the British Fascists had tried to get hold of him, but he had refused to help them: only if they came to power would he agree to be "dictator" of the press for a fortnight.

Because of Lawrence's alleged political sympathies, rumours circulated after his death that the fatal crash had been arranged by Zionists, anxious to prevent a meeting between him and Hitler. Another rumour suggested he had been eliminated by British Agents as he was about to expose Government secrets in a new book he was working on.

Lawrence was buried at Moreton churchyard on 21st May with a headstone saying:

To the dear Memory of
T.E. Lawrence

Fellow of All Souls College
Oxford

Born 16 August 1888
Died 19 May 1935

The hour is coming and now is
When the dead shall hear the
Voice of God
And they that hear shall live

A bust of Lawrence by Eric Kennington was placed in the Crypt of St. Paul's Cathedral, and a recumbent figure in Arab dress, also by Kennington, in the ancient church at Wareham.

Clouds Hill, Lawrence's primitive cottage, was taken over by the National Trust, but such was the charisma of Lawrence that visitors were wont to steal anything they could get their hands on, including the screw of the porthole window in the bedroom, and the hasps of other windows.

Henry's dream to save Europe from another war was temporarily shattered. But that same year, Henry went to Berlin to visit his friend John Heygate, who was employed at the Ufa film studios. They attended a Nazi rally at Nurnberg and Henry became convinced that Hitler was the real Messiah of Europe. Two years later, in 1937, Henry joined Sir Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists, a subject I covered in issue 10 of *The Journal*.

Henry had a new hero, a new Leader.