

With Lawrence of Arabia

IN LAWRENCE'S BODYGUARD. By GURNEY SLADE. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company. 1930. \$2.

Reviewed by A Friend of 'T. E. LAWRENCE'

IN a short and admirable preface, the author of this boy's book says:

By his exploits in Arabia, Lawrence has delivered himself into the hands of fiction writers for all time, and by weaving a few of the incidents of his campaign into the plot of a boy's book, I am only one of the forerunners of a mighty horde. My hope is that this book of mine may serve as a finger-post to "grown-up" non-pictorial works, such as Lawrence's own record, "Revolt in the Desert," and Robert Graves' (sic) fascinating volume, "Lawrence and the Arabs," to both of which I am indebted.

It is immediately apparent from the book that Mr. Gurney is a man of taste and sensibility, although not entirely knowledgeable. The hero is at school when the story opens. He is observed by Lord Carstanley during a game of rugger, and immediately afterwards is offered a job in Arabia, to find a certain stone stolen during a past excavation. He accepts, and the rest of the story recounts his adventures until the outbreak of the Great War, when, after serving Prince Feisal, he joins Lawrence's bodyguard. The story ends with the Capture of Damascus, when a sadness comes upon the bodyguard because Lawrence, at the climax of his life, slips away and leaves behind only vacancy and dream for those who had served him with all their vitality.

Mr. Slade's taste and sensibility are revealed in his reticent handling of the Lawrence material (a direct contrast to a certain American journalist-lecturer, by whose methods Lawrence was made to feel the greatest *malaise*) and in his obvious determination not to write sensationally. The boy hero Baxter appears to be derived from a dream of Lawrence, and is therefore genuinely a character of fiction. Lawrence as Lawrence in the book is a

With Lawrence of Arabia

minor or slight-appearing character, yet he dominates the book like snow-capped Everest seen from a remote distance. The book is in proportion, and merits our thanks for that. There are one or two unknowledgeable points, such as the dialogue between Headmaster and Carstanley, which is "most frightfully correct," except where the author tries to offset the stiltedness with colloquialisms which no Old Etonian ("We were at Eton together," says Lord C.) would use in normal conversation. (By the way, one of the best and most penetrating stories of school life the present reviewer has read is shortly to be published in the U. S. A.—"Decent Fellows," by John Heygate—a unique transcription of a boy's experiences at Eton.)



There is one lapse which is to be deplored, although it is, alas, a commonplace of boys' fiction. The Turkish generals, visiting the Arabs before the Revolt, are described (by the impartial author) as "the pair of Turkish ruffians," and "at any moment the crack of a dozen revolvers might sound the death knell of the two Turkish desperadoes." Tut, tut, Mr. Slade. The campaign in Palestine was not so easy at that; nevertheless your book shall be successful, for no boy will get the least glimmer of war's reality from it. The style is a mixture of utter badness (as above) and commonplace but careful composition; and the qualities of heroism, bravery (but not loyalty) are somewhat unreal. The hero, Baxter (aged about nineteen), has a bullet cut out of his leg without wincing. He is a strong man, certainly, but a little too strong for his tender age. "I don't believe all the yarns they tell about me," Aircraftsman T. E. Shaw once wrote, in reference to the Laurentian legend. "The Arab business was a freak in my living: in ordinary times I'm plumb normal." Normal, yes; but only the normally strong arise to be normal after trial and error. Shakespeare was plumb normal. What a boy's book could be written on that theme—a boy struggling to be true to himself! Its author would probably be accused of corrupting the morals of Youth.