

ON an early summer's day of 1935 T. E. Lawrence — Lawrence of Arabia as he was, and still is, known to almost everyone—was speeding on his motor-cycle along a country road in Dorset when he swerved to avoid two boys cycling abreast. He was thrown violently and after lingering unconscious died five days later. "His drug was speed," his friend Sir Ronald Storrs said later, "and speed was the dope which cost him his life." Twenty years after his death the world is still arguing about the sort of man Lawrence was. Two recent books, published within a week or two of one another, will be read by all who have followed the argument. One is an unlimited edition of *The Mint*, Law-



G. C. A. WALL

rence's own story of Air Force life; the other is *Lawrence of Arabia: a Biographical Enquiry*, by Richard Aldington, who has already gained some notoriety as an iconoclast with *Portrait of a Genius*, But — his book about D. H. Lawrence.

The other day an advance copy of Aldington's *Lawrence of Arabia*—which should be on sale in this country this month—turned up on the desk of a New Zealander who had met Lawrence just before he left the R.A.F. College at Cranwell—which was where he wrote the preface to *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* in August, 1926, long before the 30-guinea edition of the book saw the light of day. The New Zealander was Arnold Wall, now Talks Officer at 3YA, who will be heard reviewing Aldington's book in *Book Shop* on Wednesday, March 23.

Arnold Wall, who went to the R.A.F. straight from school, told *The Listener* that when he arrived at Cranwell in 1926 as "a gangling flight-cadet," Lawrence, who had worked as a clerk in one of the flight-hangars, was on the point of leaving for another station. "At that time," said Mr. Wall, "my thoughts and desires were directed almost exclusively towards aircraft and motor-cycles. One day when I was down at the local petrol station and beheld a monstrous glittering motor-cycle, the like of which I had never seen, I made haste to get into conversation with the owner. I met him in this way three or four times, and that's all the personal contact I ever had with him. As I remember him, he was slightly built and quite unremarkable to look at, apart from a keen eye and an engaging grin. He was very friendly and eager to point out the glories of his

motor-cycle, and I had neither the temerity nor the knowledge to carry the conversation beyond these mundane limits."

The English Professor at Cranwell — the late Rupert de la Bere—was a friend and admirer of Lawrence, and fired young Wall with his enthusiasm for the man. De la Bere had managed to persuade Lawrence to present to the College library his own reader's proof copy of the *Seven Pillars*, which was profusely annotated all over the fly leaves and down the margin with comments, asides and explanations in "that distinctive classical-scholar hand." "I read it through twice while I was at Cranwell," Mr. Wall said, "and I only wish to goodness that I had then had

the sense to make my own copy of the annotations, but of course I never did. This proof is still in the College library at Cranwell, but I gather they're not quite so willing these days to let anyone borrow it.

"Later, in 1930, I was stationed in the mud fort at Miranshah, on the Indian North-West Frontier, where Lawrence had been stationed two or three years earlier and had passed his time in translating the *Odyssey*. While he was there he'd receive between 100 and 200 books



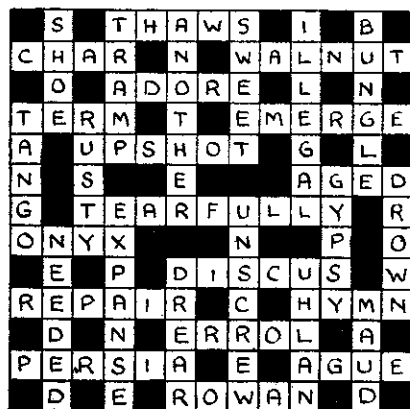
T. E. LAWRENCE BBC photograph
His drug was speed and it cost him his life

from England, many of them first editions inscribed for him by the most prominent writers of the day—Hardy, Bernard Shaw and Wells, for example—and he'd marginally annotated many of them in great detail, for he was a passionate margin-scribbler. When he left he handed all these books over to the airman's library, but alas, an intelligent Indian realised their value and decamped with the lot. So far as I know they've never been recovered, though no doubt they'll have found their way on to the collectors' black market."

In India and afterwards Mr. Wall met some dozens of airmen who had known Lawrence pretty well in barracks, and he found as a rule that the ones most eager to discuss him were the ones who had known him least. His closer friends were less willing to talk—they had found by bitter experience that any anecdote or reminiscence was likely to be published, generally in a sensational form. "Long after his death," said Mr. Wall, "the papers were avid for any scraps of Lawrentiana, and Lawrence's friends in the ranks were on their guard, to protect him from publicity—not that he'd have cared, either way."

Mr. Wall said, however, that he'd known three or four former airmen—men who had exchanged letters with Lawrence more or less regularly right up to the end—who were happy to talk about him for hours at a time once they'd realised one wasn't going to cash in on what they were going to say. For these men Lawrence was a sort of elder brother whose heroic past was far less important to them than his present kindly friendship and help with their literary, or other difficulties. "We never thought or talked much about his Arabian background, except when we saw him under the shower," was the sort of thing they used to say. "Then the scars and marks all over his body would remind us."

(Solution to No. 737)



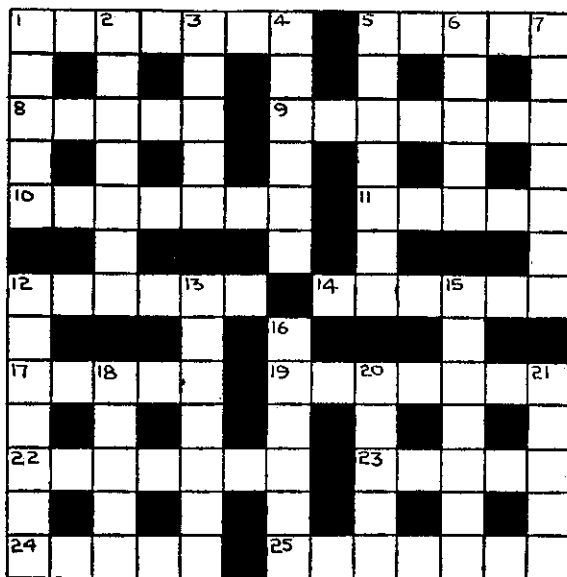
- Sailor and saint begin to refrain.
- Article of apparel found in a terrific hubbub.
- Sam Costa at the races?
- This bald patch could give you a sore nut.
- Total collapse of a lace bed.
- The boss loses his head and finds a flower.
- Half the score in a utensil may be powerful.
- Quest for the arches?
- Part of the lowest hinge on a door.

- Apparently those who travelled in this primitive boat carried their own infallible guide with them.
- Proceed from a sea-cow.
- "Gallop —, you fiery-footed steeds, Towards Phoebus' lodging" ("Romeo and Juliet").

- Produce.
- Unearthed.

- Prize of war in our time?
- Old fashioned musical instrument made of a combination of tub and cask.
- The beginning of an anticyclone.
- You'll find me in this spice.
- Diet for admirers? To be eaten with a flourish of trumpets, perhaps.
- "Give me again my hollow tree, A — of bread, and liberty!" (Pope).
- A hunter may do this, especially an archaeological one.

No. 738 (Constructed by R.W.H.)



- Wine is usually contained in bottles, yet port is found in earthenware.
- Grading for a stingy person.
- I'm clear (anag.).
- He comes before me in this plan.
- I'm over age.
- Scope of a rare achievement.
- Correct.