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As Others Saw Him

A PROGRAMME built from recollections of a great writer by people who knew him closely could not fail to be interesting; but *Son and Lover,* described on page 14, may leave a feeling that the real D. H. Lawrence has not been found. It is hard enough to see any man distinctly, for he reveals himself in different ways to those around him, and will even borrow a little from their personalities. A writer and poet is more than usually elusive: he responds sensitively to people and places, and may seem to change so often that he suffers from imputations of weakness. To be sensitive is to be thin-skinned, so that reactions may be irritable, and it becomes necessary to adopt some sort of protection from a world that touches the nerves too sharply. Some artists retreat into a studied aloofness; others make a cult of rudeness, and are so aggressive that it is hard to detect the fears beneath the mask.

D. H. Lawrence was not big enough—or perhaps strong enough—to live in stillness at the centre of turbulence. His life was full of quarrel and controversy. Some of his works were banned, and he was never free from the sort of criticism which verges on persecution. His early relationship with Frieda gave support to those who declared his ideas to be pernicious. He was prone to enthusiasms and despairs; his emotional instability, quickened by the strains of writing, showed the influence of the disease which killed him. Perhaps, too, there was some connection between the shadow on his lungs and his feverish search for the perfect environment, though his feeling for "place" was undoubtedly a strong element in his poetry. In spite of illness and poverty, he was able to travel widely (he even spent a day in Wellington, and sent a postcard about it to Katherine Mansfield). And this was because he was never without friends to lend him money, find houses for him to live in, and suffer his impatience.

Some people will help an artist for the sake of his talent, others because they are drawn irresistibly by suggestions of power; but a few are faithful because they love the man, and can see further than his weaknesses. Lawrence made no special effort to keep his friends. The combination of indigence and pride so often found in artists, leading them to despise society while regally expecting its favours, must have made him a difficult person. A perceptive biographer, Catherine Carswell, said of him: "It was necessary, I believe, for Lawrence to create a great deal of mess in his human contacts—necessary to his work." There is something almost inhuman in an artist's readiness to sacrifice other people—or would be, if he were not so obviously ready to sacrifice himself as well. In a man of average talent this singleness of purpose can look like aberration, though it may rest on a conviction that the work he is doing is of real importance. But a man of genius seems to justify himself through his writing.

Lawrence was no pretender; he did not play at being a writer, or expect large patronage in return for small performance, but poured out his energy in novels which some critics believe to be among the greatest in English literature. Always he was intensely alive, able to spread his vitality through a surprising number of interests, and by no means an "Edward Driffield" who remained a shadow outside his books. Such a man makes enemies and a few friends. He is full of contradictions (it is odd to find Catherine Carswell describing the author of *The Rainbow* as "prudish"), and seems to invite misunderstanding. Yet in the end, when he has to be judged by what he wrote, the turbulence begins to fade into legend. Lawrence died young, so that his friends are still able to speak of the man as they saw him. But the survivors are ageing, and the years take much of the sting from old hurts, and sharpen the profile of greatness. It will soon be too late to know him except through his works.

—M.H.H.