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Debunking Lawrence of Arabia

DEBUNKING WAS THOUGHT to be an outworn literary fad.

All of the great dead of the past had served their turn. But there are still some living heroes; and it appears that their turn is coming.

Lawrence of Arabia, alias Aircraftsman Shaw, is said to be resigning from the Royal Air Force, so Mr. Hannan Swaffer of *John Bull* (London) seizes on him and writes an "open letter" telling Mr. Lawrence that his turn has come. It's like this:

"My Dear Lawrence: So they say that you are leaving the Royal Air Force.

"It would be nice to know that disarmament had come true, if only to that extent. For, like many other people, I am utterly sick of reading in the newspapers about your latest 'secrecy.'

"Never was the mysterious so public as in your case. Altho it is not your fault, I am sure, your modesty has become a form of blatancy.

"You were 'Colonel Lawrence.' You were 'the Uncrowned King of Arabia.' And now you are 'Aircraftsman Shaw.' How silly!

"After being the hero of scores of thrilling exploits in the desert, after brilliant work in the war, after being praised, or blamed, for a score of plots and schemes for this, or against that, you changed your name and hid yourself in a humble uniform in the Royal Air Force, because you wanted peace and quiet, they said, for the great task of translating the *Odyssey*!

"Then it was not for that reason. It was because your doctor had warned you that you had only eighteen months to live. Well, it is a new one on me that dying men are allowed to enlist in the Fighting Services. Of course, I do not believe a word of it, and I do not believe anybody believes a word of it. But they kept on printing it.

"Well, anyway, 'Aircraftsman Shaw' was cheaper, I am certain, than 'Colonel Lawrence.' We all know you are a hero, a chivalrous gentleman, a scholar, a Paladin. We know that millions of Arabs trusted you when they would trust no one else.

"But I have just returned from that part of the world where you made such a great reputation. And, frankly, my own idea is that adventures such as yours merely cost the country a great deal of money and, in the end, lead to nothing.

"You see, the trouble about you was that you were so utterly unselfish, so far beyond suspicion. When other Englishmen have gone abroad, they have sometimes grabbed large tracts of territory, or been the nominees of some plundering commercial enterprise.

"When you advised some new diplomatic move, governments listened to you because you were so utterly unselfish about it all. And, quite frankly, between you and me, diplomacy, to-day, has

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been proved to be just the bunk.

"I was in Syria a few weeks ago. Now it was with your aid that the Emir Faisal became King of Syria. This was hailed as 'the culminating step in the working out of the British policy in the Near East.' Where is it?

"When I was in Damascus, there wasn't any Emir Faisal there. He had sloped off somewhere else to found another kingdom, or to start some new trouble by his own aggrandizement. Somebody had told him to get out of Syria, or else he had merely run away on his own.

"And there were the unfortunate Syrians being tyrannized over by the French."

MR. SWAFFER has some more bile to work off. He sneers at the great price, £400, for a copy of "Seven Pillars of Wisdom," which was the title of the unabridged "Revolt in the Desert." He sniffs at the man who said to him: "I have held 'Seven Pillars of Wisdom' in my hands," and thinks "this sort of hero-worship is a public menace." And goes on:

"Frankly, we have lost faith in all this sort of stuff. It has all failed, you see. The great diplomats are all exposed. The world's great 'mysteries' are all 'revealed.'

"We realize that we have been kidded for years. All the wise people like you have failed; whether, in the desert, they have drest like Arabs, or whether, on their way to the Foreign Office, they wore tall hats in Bond Street, we do not believe it any more. The whole world is seeking freedom. And yet the whole world is clubbed by tyrants. The tumult and the shouting has died . . . or was it only just starting? It isn't your fault. You are just the goat, like everybody else."



From "John Bull" (London)

Lawrence Unmasked

His "modesty has become a form of blatancy," says Hannan Swaffer.