LITERARY DIGEST
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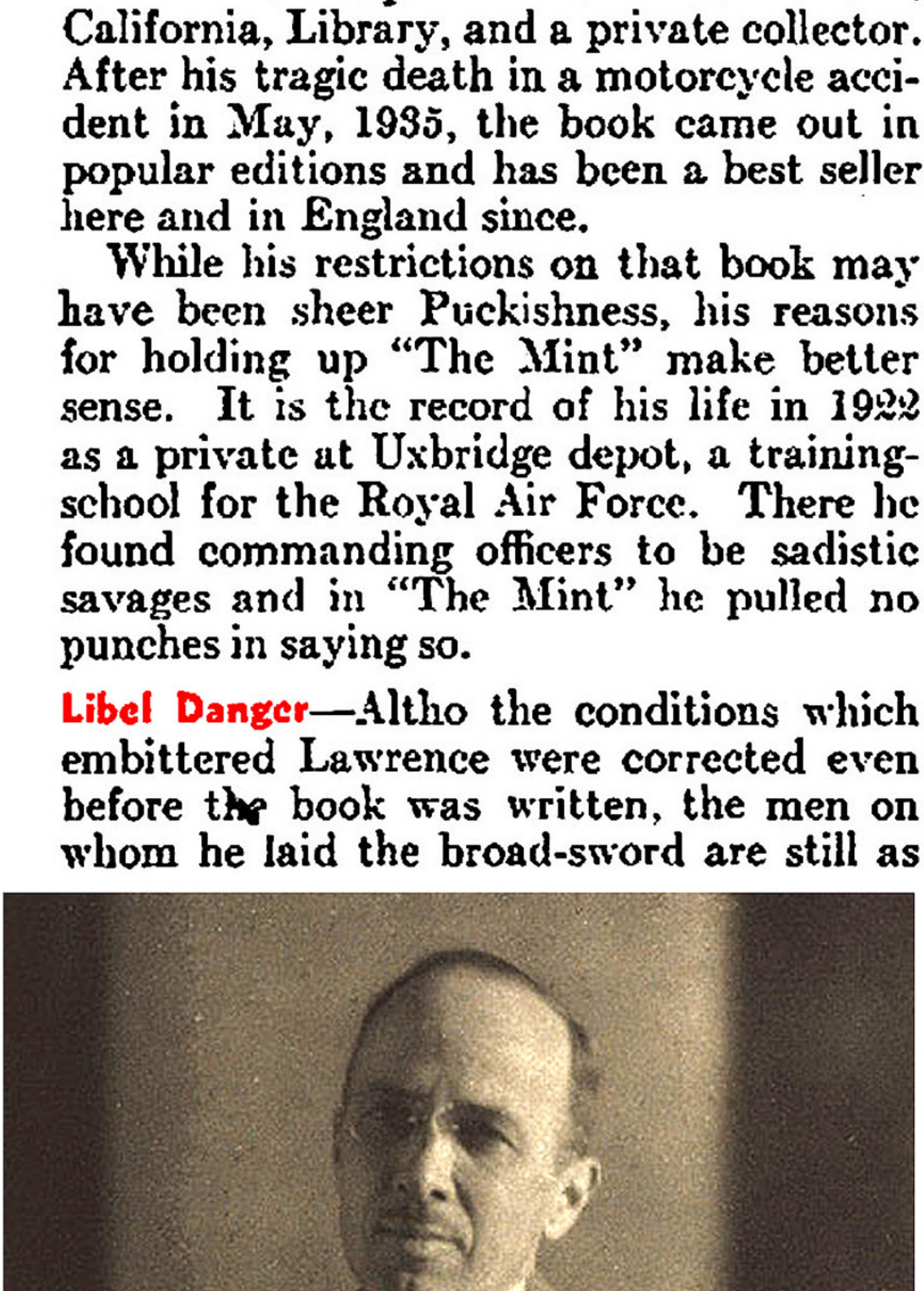
LITERARY COUP: Reviewer Writes of Lawrence Book, Kept "Secret" Until 1950

The Saturday Review of Literature, weekly guide-post for the *literati*, last week scooped the world with an air-tight exclusive story that was scheduled to be front-page news fourteen years hence. The editorial coup was a review of Thomas Edward Lawrence's (Lawrence of Arabia) final book, "The Mint," which, by the terms of his will was not to be made known to the world until 1950.

Lawrence, who was the most fabulous, unfathomable and legendary character in this generation's world of letters, had had publishing whims before. He completed "Seven Pillars of Wisdom," a protesting autobiography of his campaigns to help free Arabia from the Turks, in 1926. That year he published an edition of ten copies, priced at $20,000 each, and announced that it was not to be publicly printed while he lived. There were two purchasers: The Pasadena, California, Library, and a private collector. After his tragic death in a motorcycle accident in May, 1935, the book came out in popular editions and has been a best seller here and in England since.

While his restrictions on that book may have been sheer Puckishness, his reasons for holding up "The Mint" make better sense. It is the record of his life in 1922 as a private at Uxbridge depot, a training-school for the Royal Air Force. There he found commanding officers to be sadistic savages and in "The Mint" he pulled no punches in saying so.

Libel Danger—Altho the conditions which embittered Lawrence were corrected even before the book was written, the men on whom he laid the broad-sword are still as



Henry Seidel Canby . . . scoop critic

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LITERARY COUP

T. E. Lawrence's life to be revealed in 1950

alive as the libel laws. The author's representatives—who, like the rest of the world, can only guess—believe that fear of libel suits was only half the reason for Lawrence's insisting on a deferred publication. The other, they say, was that he did not want his scathing denunciations of the officers to be read by them, and there is only a remote possibility that any of them will survive until 1950.

With Lawrence's death the executors of his estate turned the manuscript over to his publishers in England and the United States.

Doubleday, Doran announced in August, 1935, that they would issue ten copies for sale—a necessity to protect the copyright—at $500,000 a copy, the highest financial value ever placed upon a contemporary volume in the history of publication, which was obviously to prohibit sales, and abide by the author's will.

Two of the editors of *The Saturday Review* (they modestly wish to remain anonymous) pricked up their ears at this announcement. If "The Mint" is to be copyrighted, they reasoned, two copies will automatically go to the Library of Congress and become public property.

The magazine's lawyers pored over copyright rules to determine the legality of review under such circumstances and discovered that the periodical was well within its rights.

Vigil—Then followed more than a year of hawk-like watching. The editors assigned one man to Washington whose sole task it was to watch for the granting of the copyright. Doubleday, Doran so carefully guarded its appropriately named property, that, tho the copyright cleared September 25 of this year, it took until last week to discover it. The two editors, who had been sitting on their secret for fifteen long months, dispatched Henry Seidel Canby, well known critic, editor and Lawrence

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scholar, to Washington for the review.

In the dreary Rare Book Room, off the main reading-room of the Congressional Library, Mr. Canby sat down to his delightful task. He discovered that Lawrence had dedicated his book to the English author, Edward Garnett,—best known for his "Lady Into Fox"—that he had used neither his right name nor T. E. Shaw, which he had legally adopted, but had chosen the pseudonym "A/c Ross." (The A/c stands for Aircraftsman.)

Mr. Canby found that a third of the pages of the volume he was reading were uncut, so he asked the librarian if he might see the other copy. With a million dollars' worth of literature in his lap, the reviewer went from one copy to another, to write a criticism that has rocked publishing circles.

The book is a mere pamphlet when its length is compared with "Seven Pillars of Wisdom." It runs a little less than 70,000 words and is divided into two parts. The first is no more than the actual diary Lawrence kept while at the air school, but that is the real gist of "The Mint." The second part contains letters and scattered notes from which the author planned to elaborate. In his dedication Lawrence explained that this was just a porch to a great book he wanted to write on the air force. Mr. Canby, in his review, wrote: "It is not a book, it is a foundation, a porch to a great edifice that was never built. It was to be a Life in the Air Service, as 'The Seven Pillars' was a Life in a Revolution and a victory."

Revelatory—Mr. Canby found in "The Mint" the most revealing puges of autobiography ever written, in which the author turns a crystal-clear mirror on his soul and his difficulties in adjusting himself to the world. "The reflective reader must see that Lawrence is one of the psychic cases which give the best argument to the psychological interpreters of history. His whole Arabian adventure was the attempt of a frustrated idealist to salve his soul by action. And now one sees that behind this Puritan motive was another deeper still; the desire of the congenital solitary to make his genius run with the needs of the lot of men."

In conclusion the reviewer states his personal belief that "The Mint" is better than any book which might have been written from its framework. "There was, I think, no likelihood that any important edifice of literary art would have been created beyond this porch."

The publication of the review left Doubleday, Doran breathless and annoyed. With the book now recognized as public property they have no hope of observing the letter of Lawrence's will. And they are brought face to face with publishers' chronic nightmare—libel. They can take no steps to prevent any one from reading it, including the officers who are mentioned in no flattering fashion. The law in England reads, "The greater the truth, the greater the libel," one representative admitted dejectedly.

To date, the firm announced, there have been no bidders for the ten copies that are

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for sale. They are safely locked in a bank vault, and can still be bought for the original asking price. But they will allow no prospective purchaser the right to inspect the 200-odd pages—even if they believe he is serious about purchasing, and not an idle curiosity seeker, or a reviewer who doesn't want to make the trip to Washington.

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