

# A RECOLLECTION OF WYNDHAM LEWIS

*Lorne Pierce*

The following recollection is part of a letter which the late Lorne Pierce wrote on the 29th April, 1960 to W. K. Rose, then editing Lewis's letters. It is published with the permission of Professor Rose and of H. Pearson Gundy, Lorne Pierce's literary executor.

**L**EWIS FIRST MET me in 1941. He had come to Toronto with his wife, and was very restless, critical of Toronto, and, I seem to recall, the world, if not indeed the cosmos! He was uprooted, and wanted the friends he had known, and the opponents even, of the Old World. Canada, immersed in the tension and confusion of the War, its cultural life in a sense "organized for victory", had little time for the amenities. There were few small groups in which he felt at home, and, badgered constantly over funds, and the business of sitting it out in Canada until Peace, he was not at peace in his turbulent soul. His quarters were not to his liking, the rooms, and their care; likewise the food. He had a low opinion of authors and artists everywhere. They were all hollow men, recreant, two unforgiveable sins!

He came to my office (I was then Editor-in-Chief of The Ryerson Press, the "mother publishing house of Canada", est. 1829) unannounced. He wanted to do my portrait, a crayon sketch. I was very busy, and had no time to pose. Besides, I told him that, having sat for three oils, and a bust (the best is now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, I think), I had been done to death. However, he said that he was most anxious to do this portrait. He was without work, or prospects, and I could help him by consenting to sit. It would mean contacts, and such he must have to survive until war's end. I agreed, providing that he sketched

while I worked in my office, and he was pleased. He worked away on a large sheet of paper, thumb-tacked to a board, but suddenly rose, and in disgust rolled the sheet into a ball, strode to the wpb, and threw it in. He tore out of my office without a word, banged the door and was gone. Some days later he returned, and without knocking entered, sat in an arm chair near me, and began work again. He repeated this a day or so later, and then showed me the result, a striking study, vigorous, probing, his commentary on the sitter and not a flattering "likeness". I liked it, of course, and asked him why he went to so much trouble over an unknown. He replied that he was interested in my face and head, that it represented a challenge to him, and that it reminded him of De Valera, whom he had painted. He crowned that by saying that I reminded him of De Valera *and* Mephistopheles! He said this laughing, and I was bound to laugh with him. My daughter has this, for months later he returned and presented it to me signed and dated. He said that he had used it many times with prospective clients, and that it had brought him success. I do not know who his sitters were.

We met off and on until he returned to England. We were interested in importing for Canada his British publications, but the hazards of war shipping and other complications made this unsuccessful. I liked an outline he did of a small thing on the British Commonwealth, and urged him to develop it into a small book. This became "Anglosaxony: A League that Works." Our ideas were almost identical on this matter. I had begun as early as 1929 to develop the theme of Canadian nationalism based upon an entente cordiale at home between French and English, and a closer entente between the component parts of the Commonwealth. Lewis was all for this, and in the end he handed me his Ms, which we published.

Lewis was already concerned about his vision, and had moments of great depression. But, in most respects, the world was sadly out of joint. I liked him very much. He was a veritable volcano of energy, for ever sending up showers of ideas, hunches, impressions, imprecations, and the odd benevolent blessing.