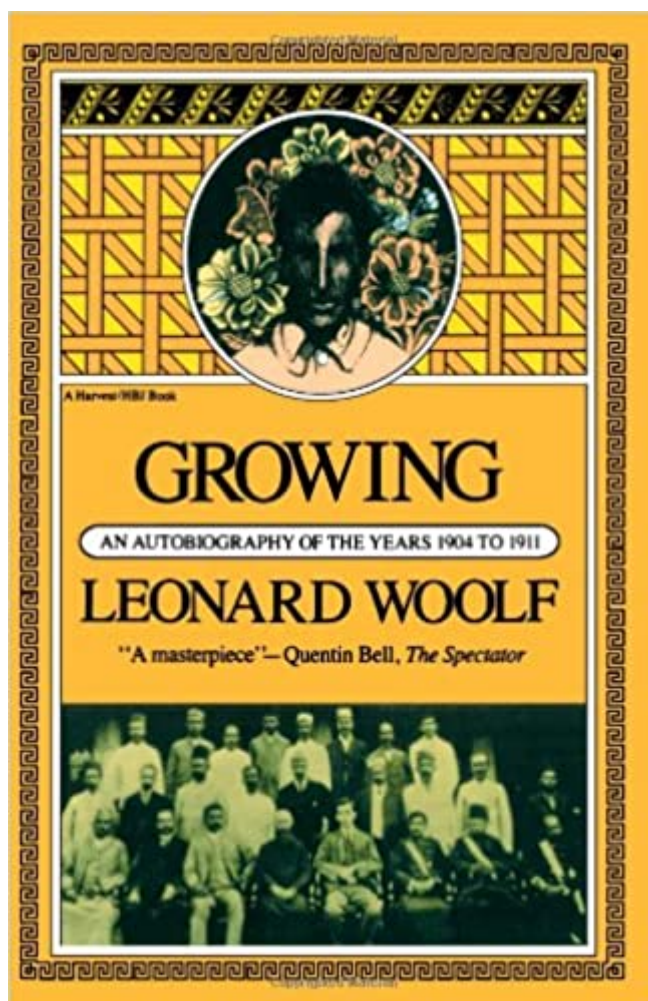


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Growing: An Autobiography Of The Years 1904 To 1911



Synopsis

Woolf's account of his seven years as a civil servant in Ceylon. "He has a seemingly effortless way with words which is beautiful and spellbinding" (J. M. Edelstein, New Republic). Index; photographs.

Book Information

Series: Harvest Book; Hb 320

Paperback: 264 pages

Publisher: Mariner Books; First Thus edition (October 18, 1989)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0156372150

ISBN-13: 978-0156372152

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.7 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 2 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,628,130 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #42 in [Books > Travel > Asia > Sri Lanka](#) #8511 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Travelers & Explorers](#) #309724 in [Books > Textbooks](#)

Customer Reviews

Leonard Sidney Woolf (November 25, 1880 – August 14, 1969) was a noted British political theorist, author, publisher, and civil servant, but perhaps now best known as the widower of author Virginia Woolf. Works The Village in the Jungle - 1913 The Wise Virgins - 1914 International Government - 1916 The Future of Constantinople - 1917 Cooperation and the Future of Industry - 1918 Economic Imperialism - 1920 Empire and Commerce in Africa - 1920 Socialism and Co-operation - 1921 Fear and Politics - 1925 Essays on Literature, History, Politics - 1927 Hunting the Highbrow - 1927 Imperialism and Civilization - 1928 After the Deluge (Principia Politica), 3 vols. - 1931, 1939, 1953 Quack! Quack! - 1935 Barbarians At The Gate - 1939 The War for Peace - 1940 A Calendar of Consolation - selected by Leonard Woolf, 1967 Autobiographical Works Woolf, Leonard (1960). Sowing: an autobiography of the years, 1880–1904. London: Hogarth Press. OCLC 185524636. Published in America as Woolf, Leonard (1960). Sowing: an autobiography of the years, 1880–1904 (1st American ed.). New York: Harcourt, Brace. ISBN 9780156839457. OCLC 1346957. Also OCLC 1339821. Woolf, Leonard (1961). Growing: an autobiography of the years 1904-1911 (1st American ed.). New York: Harcourt, Brace & World. OCLC 494500. Also OCLC 21246847 (1977), OCLC 67527334 (1967). Woolf, Leonard (1963).

Diaries in Ceylon, 1908–1911, and Stories from the East: records of a colonial administrator. London: Hogarth Press. OCLC 30240642. Also OCLC 4194108 Woolf, Leonard (1964). Beginning again: an autobiography of the years 1911–1918. London: Hogarth Press. ISBN 9780701202507. OCLC 186031278. Published in America as Woolf, Leonard (1964). Beginning again: an autobiography of the years 1911–1918 (1st American ed.). New York: Harcourt, Brace & World. OCLC 264298. Woolf, Leonard (1967). Downhill all the way: an autobiography of the years 1919–1939 (1st American ed.). New York: Harcourt, Brace & World. OCLC 1065888. Woolf, Leonard (1969). The journey not the arrival matters: an autobiography of the years 1939–1969. London: Hogarth Press. ISBN 9780701203269. OCLC 186031338. Published in America as Woolf, Leonard (1969). The journey not the arrival matters: an autobiography of the years 1939–1969 (1st American ed.). New York: Harcourt, Brace & World. OCLC 58615.

Growing is Woolf's autobiographical account of his life in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in the Ceylon Civil Service from 1907 to 1914. Written with the wisdom of hindsight, yet with an immediacy prompted by his personal letters to a friend and the official diaries he was required to write, Woolf provides an entertaining and insightful record of British imperialism. The author's voice, in the relating of events, reveals as much as the details of his experiences. On the first page the reader cannot but help noticing Woolf's detached observance of everything around him, indicative of the self-assurance and self-righteousness of Britain's dominance over its subjects. As the story progresses, the author's detachment is tempered by his preoccupation with own trials and the onerous responsibilities expected of a British Civil Servant. However, Woolf, in hindsight does not apologise for his strict code of governance but puts it down to a personality trait. The picture that emerges from Woolf's personal experience is the incongruousness of Britain's presence amidst the exoticness of Ceylon. Though some expats adapted eventually, somehow, to the country's physical and cultural environment, it was a difficult fit. Though Woolf remarks on the obscenity of the treatment the British inflicted on the natives in pursuit of organisation and discipline, the demands of the job on the civil servant was equally punishing. Their duties extended them far beyond their job description. The gradual blunting of sensibilities can be seen in the vast contrast between Woolf berating a father for his ill-treatment of his daughter on the boat to Ceylon and the horrors that he ignored or accepted, as the natives did, throughout his governance. He admits to his ambitions but this is tempered by the unfairness

and viciousness of what he sees in Britain's imperialism. The closed society of British, the isolation of government officials, the daunting jobs expected of them and the absurdity of being outnumbered one to thousands, as he describes of a pilgrimage, demonstrates the bigger than life events Woolf experiences. The ability to carry it off is evidence of Britain's ability to organise and control its subjects, but efforts do not enlighten or change the population. Britain bullishly imposes on the country the way Leonard's dog ravages the other dogs and native fauna on their own territory. Superficially, everyone accepts the terms, but everyone knows that all will be forgotten and everything will return to the way it was as soon as the invaders abandoned their posts.

I'm biased: I loved this book because it brought back memories of the time I lived in Sri Lanka in the mid-1990s. Like Leonard Woolf, I've stayed in the Queen's Hotel in Kandy; I've eaten egg hoppers; I've experienced the joy of solitary travel in the central mountains and the beaches of the south; I've seen the monsoon pummel the earth; I've even visited the bungalow where Woolf lived in Hambantota. The book took me back to a formative time in my life. But even readers who couldn't find Sri Lanka on a map will enjoy Woolf's sensitive, intelligent memoirs about his youthful service as a colonial officer. The book tends to focus on expat Englishmen, and not on Sri Lankans or their culture, but it will, nevertheless, transport readers to another time and place, when a small number of self-confident English officials ruled "native populations" across the globe. (I suppose today these young Englishmen go to The City to make money.) The book will also cause readers to reflect on the choices they made (or didn't make) in their twenties. (Woolf decided he didn't want to be an imperialist.) It's great stuff. Six stars.

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