

OF HUMAN BONDAGE

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W. Somerset Maugham

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W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM
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Introduction by Gore Vidal



THE MODERN LIBRARY
NEW YORK

The air looks grey and dull. The clouds hang heavily, and there was a mistiness in the air that suggested snow. A woman servant came into a room in which a child was sleeping and drew the curtains. She glanced across the hall at the house opposite, a stucco house with a portico, and went to the child's bed.

"Wake up, Philip," she said. She pulled down the bed-clothes, took him in her arms, and carried him downstairs. He was only half awake.

"Your mother wants you," she said. She opened the door of a room on the floor below and took the child over to a bed in which a woman was lying. It was his mother. She stretched out her arms, and the child nestled by her side. He did not see why he had been awakened. The woman kissed his eyes, and with slow, steady hands felt the warm body through his white flannel night-gown. She pressed him close to herself.

"Are you sleepy, darling?" she said. The voice was so weak that it seemed to come already from a great distance. The child did not answer, but smiled comfortably. He was very happy in the large, warm bed, with those soft arms about him. He tried to make himself smaller still as he cuddled against his mother.

W. SOMERSET
MAUGHAM
Of Human Bondage

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INTRODUCTION BY GORE VIDAL

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COMMENTARY

FOREWORD

OF HUMAN BONDAGE

INTRODUCTION

GORE VIDAL

1.

Maugham spent his first twenty-six years in the nineteenth century and for the subsequent sixty-five years he was very much a nineteenth-century novelist and playwright. In many ways he was fortunately placed, though he himself would not have thought so. He was born in Paris where his lawyer father did legal work for the British Embassy, and his mother was a popular figure in Parisian society. Maugham's first language was French and although he made himself into the premier English storyteller, his prose has always had a curious flatness to it, as if it wanted to become either Basque, English or Esperanto or perhaps go back into French.

Maugham's self-pity, which was to come to a full rather ghastly flowering in *Of Human Bondage*, was mysterious in origin. On the demerit side, he lost a beloved mother at eight; lost three older brothers to boarding school (all became lawyers and one Lord Chancellor); lost, at eleven, a not-so-well-loved father. He was then sent off to a clergyman uncle in Whitstable—home of the oyster—and then to the standard dire school of the day. On the credit side, under his father's will, he got 150 pounds a year for life, enough to live on. He was well-connected in the professional upper middle class. He had the run of his uncle's considerable library—the writer's best education. When he proved to be sickly, he was sent to the south of France; when, at seventeen, he could endure his school no more, he was sent to Heidelberg and a merry time.

On balance, the tragic wound to which he was to advert throughout a long life strikes me as no more than a scratch or two. Yes, he wanted to be taller than five foot seven; yes, he had an underslung jaw that might have been corrected; yes, he stammered. But . . . *tant pis*, as he might have observed coldly of another (used in a novel, the phrase would be helpfully translated).

Yet something was gnawing at him. As he once observed, sardonically, to his nephew Robert Maugham, "Jesus Christ could cope with all the miseries I have had to contend with in life. But the Jesus Christ had advantages I don't possess." Presumably, Jesus was a six-foot-tall blond blue-eyed body-builder whereas Maugham was slight and dark with eyes like "brown velvet"; and, of course, Jesus' father owned the shop. On the other hand, Maugham was not obliged to contend with the sadomasochistic excitement of the Crucifixion, much less the head-turning rapture of the Resurrection. It is the common view of Maugham biographers that the true tragic flaw was homosexuality, disguised as a club foot in *Of Human Bondage*—or was that the stammer? Whatever it was, Maugham was very sorry for himself. Admittedly, a liking for boys at the time of Oscar Wilde and his misadventures was dangerous but Maugham was adept at passing for MMM&G—Married, Mature, Monogamous, and Good: he *appeared* to have affairs with women, not men, and he married and fathered a daughter. There need not have been an either/or for him.

Maugham's career as a writer was singularly long and singularly successful. The cover of each book was adorned with a Moorish device to ward off the evil eye: the author knew that too much success overexcites one's contemporaries, not to mention the gods. Also, much of his complaining may have been prophylactic: to avert the furies if not the book-chatterers, and so he was able to live just as he wanted for two thirds of his life, something not many writers—or indeed anyone else—ever manage to do.

At eighteen, Maugham became a medical student at St. Thomas's Hospital, London. This London was still Dickens's great monstrous invention where

The messenger led you through the dark and silent streets of Lambeth, up stinking alleys and into sinister courts where the police hesitated to penetrate, but where your black bag protected you from harm.

For five years Maugham was immersed in the real world, while, simultaneously, he was trying to become a writer. "Few authors," Mr. Calder tells us, "read as widely as Maugham and his works are peppered with references to other literature." So they are—peppered indeed—but not always seasonally. The bilingual Maugham knew best the French writers of the day. He tells us that he modelled his short stories on Maupassant. He also tells us that he was much influenced by Ibsen, but there is no sign of that master in his own school of Wilde comedies. Later, he was awed by Chekhov's stories but, again, he could never "use" that master because something gelled very early in Maugham the writer, and once his own famous tone was set it would remain perfectly pitched to the end.

In his first published novel, *Liza of Lambeth* (1897), Maugham raised the banner of Maupassant and the French realists but the true influence on the book and its method was one Arthur Morrison, who had made a success three years earlier with *Tales of Mean Streets*. Robert Calder [Maugham's biographer] notes that Morrison,

writing with austerity and frankness, . . . refused to express sympathy on behalf of his readers so that they could then avoid coming to terms with the implications of social and economic inequality. Maugham adopted this point of view in his first novel, and was therefore, like Morrison, accused of a lack of conviction.

In general realists have always been open to the charge of coldness, particularly by romantics who believe that a novel is essentially a sermon, emotional and compassionate and so inspiring that after the peroration, the reader, wiser, kinder, *bushier* indeed, will dry his eyes and go forth to right wrongs. This critical mindset has encouraged a great deal of bad writing. The unemotional telling of a terrible story is usually more effective than the oh, by the wind-grieved school of romantic (that is, self-loving) prose. On the other hand, the plain style can help the dishonest, pusillanimous writer get himself off every kind of ideological or ethical hook. Just the facts, ma'am. In this regard Hemingway, a literary shadow self to Maugham, was our time's most artful dodger, all business, advancing verbs and stony nouns. Surfaces coldly rendered. Interiors unexplored. Manner all.

For someone of Maugham's shy, highly self-conscious nature (with a secret, too) the adoption of classic realism, Flaubert with bitters, was inevitable. Certainly, he was lucky to have got the tone absolutely right in his first book, and he was never to stray far from the appearance of plain storytelling. Although he was not much of one for making up things, he could always worry an anecdote or bit of gossip into an agreeable narrative. Later, as the years passed, he put more and more effort—even genius—into his one triumphant creation, W. Somerset Maugham, world-weary world-

traveler, whose narrative first person became the best-known and least wearisome in the world. *A* first he called the narrator “Ashenden” (a name carefully chosen so that the writer would not stammer when saying it, unlike that obstacle course for stammerers, “Maugham”); then he dropped Ashenden for Mr. Maugham himself in *The Razor’s Edge* (1944). Then he began to appear, as narrator, in film and television dramatizations of his work. Thus, one of the most-read novelists of our time became widely known to those who do not read.

Shaw and Wells invented public selves for polemical reasons, while Mark Twain and Dickens did so to satisfy a theatrical need, but Maugham contrived a voice and a manner that not only charm and surprise in a way that the others did not, but where they were menacingly larger than life, he is just a bit smaller (5’ 7’’), for which he compensates by sharing with us something that the four histrionic masters would not have dreamed of doing: inside gossip. It is these confidences that made Maugham so agreeable to read: *nothing*, he tells us with a smile, *is what it seems*. That was his one trick, and seldom failed. Also, before D. H. Lawrence, Dr. Maugham (obstetrician) knew that women, given a fraction of a chance, liked sex as much as men did. When he said so, he was called a misogynist.

In October 1907, at thirty-three, Maugham became famous with the triumphant production of *Lady Frederick* (one of six unproduced plays that he had written). Maugham ravished his audience with the daring trick of having the eponymous lady—middle-aged with ardent unsuitable youthful admirer—save the boy from his infatuation by allowing him to see her un-made-up at her dressing table. So stunned is the lad by the difference between the beauty of the *maquillage* and the crone in the mirror that he is saved by her nobleness, and right before our eyes we see “nothing is what it seems” spades, raw stuff for the theater of those days.

By 1908 Maugham had achieved the dream of so many novelists: he had four plays running in the West End and he was financially set for life. In that same year, the sixty-five-year-old impecunious Henry James was having one last desperate go at the theater. To Edith Wharton he wrote that he was

working under a sudden sharp solicitation (heaven forgive me!) for the Theatre & that I had, as a matter of life or death, to push through with my play, or rather with my 2 plays (for I’m doing two), the more important of which (though an object little cochofferie even *it*, no doubt!) is to be produced. . . . I have been governed by the one sordid & urgent consideration of the possibility of making some money. . . . Forgive so vulgar a tale—but I am utterly brazen about it; for my basic motive is all of that brassy complexion—till sicklied o’er with the reflection of another metal.

But it was to Maugham, not the Master, that the other metal came.

Maugham enjoyed his celebrity; he was a popular diner-out; he was, when he could get the words out, something of a wit. He was eminently marriageable in Edwardian eyes. So which will it be—the lion or the tiger/man? Mr. Calder cannot get enough of Maugham the faggot in conflict with Maugham the potential MMM&G. Will the good drive out evil? Maturity immaturity?

Unhappily, the witch-doctor approach to human behavior still enjoys a vogue in academe and Mr. Calder likes to put his subject on the couch, while murmuring such Freudian incantations as “loss of beloved mother, the lack of a father with whom to identify . . . follow a common pattern in the development of homosexuality.” That none of this makes any sense does not alter belief: in matters of faith inconvenient evidence is always suppressed while contradictions go unnoticed. Nevertheless, witch doctors to one side, witches did—and do—get burned, as Oscar Wilde discovered in 1895, and an entire generation of same-sexers was obliged to go underground or marry or settle in the south

France. I suspect that Maugham's experiences with women were not only few but essential. hydraulic. Writers, whether same-sexers or other-sexers, tend to have obsessive natures; consequence they cross the sexual borders rather less often than the less imaginative who want simply, to get laid or even loved. But whereas a same-sexer like Noel Coward never in his life committed an other-sexual act ("Not even with Gertrude Lawrence?" I asked. "Particularly not with Miss Lawrence" was the staccato response), Dr. Maugham had no fear of vaginal teeth—he simply shut his eyes and thought of Capri.

At twenty-one Maugham was well and truly launched by one John Ellingham Brooks, a littérateur who lived on Capri, then known for the easy charm of its boys. "The nasty procuring side" Maugham started in Capri and he kept coming back year after year. At ninety, he told a reporter, "I want to go to Capri because I started life there." In old age, he told Glenway Westcott that Brooks was his first lover. This is doubtful. Maugham told different people different things about his private life, wanting always to confuse. Certainly, for sheer energetic promiscuity he was as athletic as Byronic with a club foot, what might he not have done! Even so, "He was the most sexually voracious man I've ever known," said Beverly Nichols, the journalist and one-time Maugham secretary, who knew at first hand. Robin Maugham and the last companion, Alan Searle, agreed.

Ironically, within a dozen years of Wilde's imprisonment, Maugham was the most popular English playwright. Unlike the reckless Oscar, Maugham showed no sign of ever wanting to book so much as a room at the Cadogan Hotel. Marriage it would be. With Syrie Barnardo Wellcome, an interior decorator much liked in London's high bohemia. Fashionable wife for fashionable playwright. A daring woman of the world—an Iris March with a green hat *pour le sport*, Syrie wanted a child by Maugham without wedlock. Got it. As luck—hers and his—would have it, Maugham then went to work and promptly met the great love of his life, Gerald Haxton.

For a time Maugham was a wound dresser. Gerald was in the Ambulance Corps. They were to be together until Gerald's death twenty-nine years later, "longer than many marriages," observes the awed Mr. Calder. But there was a good deal of mess to be cleaned up along the way. Haxton could not go to England: he had been caught by the police in bed with another man. Maugham himself did not want, finally, to be even remotely MMM&G. Syrie suffered. They separated. Toward the end of his life, Maugham tried to disinherit his daughter on the ground that she was not his but, ironically, he had got a door prize for at least one dutiful attendance and she was very much his as anyone who has ever seen her or her descendants can attest: the saturnine Maugham face still gazes by proxy upon a woman where nothing is ever what it seems.

During the war, Maugham was hired by the British secret service to go to Moscow and shore up the Kerensky government. He has written of all this in both fiction (*Ashenden*—literary ancestor to Ernest Hemingway, Ian Fleming, John Le Carré) and two books of memoirs. Unfortunately, the mission to Moscow was aborted by the overthrow of Kerensky.

Maugham developed tuberculosis. During twenty months in a Scottish sanitarium he wrote four of his most popular plays, including *The Circle* and the highly successful novel *The Moon and Sixpence* where a Gauguin-like English painter is observed by the world-weary Ashenden amongst Pacific island palms. Maugham wrote his plays rather the way television writers (or Shakespeare) write their serials—*at great speed*. One week for each act and a final week to pull it all together. Since Mr. Calder is overexcited by poor Willie's rather unremarkable (stamina to one side) sex life, we get far too little analysis of Maugham's writing and of the way that he worked, particularly in the theater. From what little Mr. Calder tells us, Maugham stayed away from rehearsals but, when needed, would cut almost anything an actor wanted. This doesn't sound right to me but then when one has had twenty plays in production in England alone, there is probably not that much time or inclination to perfect the

product. In any case, Mr. Calder is, as he would put it, “disinterested” in the subject.

In 1915, while Maugham was spying for England, *Of Human Bondage* was published. Maugham now was seen to be not only a serious but a solemn novelist—in the ponderous American manner. The best that can be said of this masterpiece is that it made a good movie and launched Bette Davis’s career. Remember that on all the pre-Second War editions, there was a quotation from Theodore Dreiser to the effect that the book “has rapture, it sings.” Mr. Calder does not mention Dreiser but Mr. Frederic Raphael does, in his agreeable picture book with twee twinkly text, *Somerset Maugham and His Work* (Scribner’s, 1977). Mr. Raphael quotes from Dreiser, whom he characterizes as “an earnest thunderer in the cause of naturalism and himself a Zolaesque writer of constipated power.” Admittedly, Dreiser was not in a class with Margaret Drabble but—constipated?

The Maugham persona was now perfected in life and work. Maugham’s wit was taken for true even as he himself was well known, despite all subterfuge, to be non-MMM&G. Mr. Calder is disturbed by Maugham’s attempts at epigrams in conversation. Sternly, Mr. Calder notes: “Calculated flippancy was none the less a poor substitute for natural and easy insouciance.” But despite a near-total absence of easy insouciance, Maugham fascinated everyone. By 1929 he had settled into his villa at Cap Ferrat; he was much sought after socially even though the Windsors, the Churchills, the Beaverbrooks all knew that Haxton was more than a secretary. But the very rich and the very famous are indeed different from really real folks. For one thing, they often find funny the MMM&Gs. For another, they can create their own world and never leave it if they choose.

It is a sign of Maugham’s great curiosity and continuing sense of life (even maturity) that he never stopped traveling, ostensibly to gather gossip and landscapes for stories, but actually to come alive and indulge his twin passions, boys and bridge, two activities far less damaging to the environment than marriages, children, and big-game hunting. Haxton was a splendid organizer with similar taste. Mr. Calder doesn’t quite get all this but then his informants, chiefly nephew Robin Maugham and the last companion, Alan Searle, would have been discreet.

During the Second War, Maugham was obliged to flee France for America. In Hollywood he distinguished himself on the set of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. George Cukor had explained to William Spencer Tracy, when he turned from good Dr. Jekyll into evil Mr. Hyde. Instead, a great actor, Tracy would bring forth both evil and good from within. Action! Tracy menaces the heroine. Ingrid Bergman cowers on a bed. Tracy simpers, drools, leers. Then Maugham’s uneasy souciant voice is heard, loud and clear and stammerless. “And which one is he supposed to be now?”

During this time, the movie of *The Moon and Sixpence* was released—the twenty-third Maugham story to be filmed. Maugham himself traveled restlessly about the East coast, playing bridge. He also had a refuge in North Carolina where, while writing *The Razor’s Edge*, Haxton died. For a time Maugham was inconsolable. Then he took on an amiable young Englishman, Alan Searle, as secretary and companion, and together they returned to the Riviera where Maugham restored the war-wrecked villa and resumed his life.

One reason, prurience aside, why Mr. Calder tells us so much about Maugham’s private life (many kindnesses and charities are duly noted) is that Maugham has no reputation at all in North American academe where Mr. Calder is a spear-carrier. The result is a lot of less than half-praise:

His career had been largely a triumph of determination and will, the success in three genres of a man not naturally gifted as a writer.

Only a schoolteacher innocent of how literature is made could have written such a line. Demonstrably, Maugham was very talented at doing what he did. Now, this is for your final grade, *what* did he do? Describe, please. Unfortunately, there aren't many good describers (critics) in any generation. But I shall give it a try, presently.

At seventy-two, Maugham went to Vevey, Switzerland, where a Dr. Niehans injected aging human organisms with the cells of unborn sheep, and restored youth. All the great and not-so-good came to Niehans, including Pius XII—in a business suit and dark glasses, it was said—an old man in no hurry to meet his Jewish employer. Thanks perhaps to Niehans, Maugham survived for nearly fifteen years in rude bodily health. But body outlived mind and so it was that the senile Maugham proceeded to destroy his own great invention, W. Somerset Maugham, the teller of tales, the man inclined to the good and to right action, and above all, to common sense. By the time that old Maugham had finished with himself, absolutely nothing was what it seemed and the double self-portrait that he had given the world in *The Summing Up* and *A Writer's Notebook* was totally undone by this raging Lear upon the Riviera, who tried to disinherit daughter while adopting Searle as well as producing *Looking Back*, his final set of memoirs not quite as mad as Hemingway's but every bit as malicious. With astonishing ingenuity, the ancient Maugham mined his own monument; and blew it up.

For seven decades Maugham had rigorously controlled his personal and his artistic life. He would write so many plays, and stop; and did. So many novels, and stop; and did. So many short stories. He rounded off everything neatly, and lay back to die, with a quiet world-weary smile on those ancient lizard lips. But then, to his horror, he kept on living, and having sex, and lunching with Churchill at Beaverbrook. Friends thought that Beaverbrook put him up to the final memoir, but I suspect that Maugham had grown very bored with a lifetime of playing it so superbly safe.

2.

It is very difficult for a writer of my generation, if he is honest, to pretend indifference to the work of Somerset Maugham. He was always so entirely *there*. By seventeen I had read all of Shakespeare; and all of Maugham. Perhaps more to the point, he dominated the movies at a time when movies were the lingua franca of the world. Although the French have told us that the movie is the creation of the director, no one in the twenties, thirties, forties paid the slightest attention to who had directed *Human Bondage*, *Rain*, *The Moon and Sixpence*, *The Razor's Edge*, *The Painted Veil*, *The Letter*. The true creator was W. Somerset Maugham, and a generation was in thrall to his sensuous, exotic imaginings of a duplicitous world.

Although Maugham received a good deal of dutiful praise in his lifetime, he was never to be taken very seriously in his own country or the United States, as opposed to Japan where he has been for two thirds of a century the most read and admired Western writer. Christopher Isherwood tells us that he met Maugham at a Bloomsbury party where Maugham looked most ill at ease with the likes of Virginia Woolf. Later Isherwood learned from a friend of Maugham's that before the party, in a agony of indecision, as the old cliché master might have put it, he had paced his hotel sitting room saying, "I'm just as good as they are."

I suspect that he thought he was probably rather better *for what he was*, which was not at all what they were. Bloomsbury disdained action and commitment other than to Art and to Friendship (which meant going to bed with one another's husbands and wives). Maugham liked action. He risked his life in floods, monsoons, the collapse of holy Russia. He was worldly like Hemingway, who also stalked the big game of wild places, looking for stories, self. As for what he thought of himself, Mr. Caldwell quotes Maugham to the headmaster of his old school: "I think I ought to have the O.M. [Order

Merit]. . . . They gave Hardy the O.M. and I think I am the greatest living writer of English, and the ought to give it to me.” When he did get a lesser order, Companion of Honour, he was sardonic: “means very well done . . . but.”

But. There is a definite but. I have just reread for the first time in forty years *The Narrow Corner*, book I much admired; *The Razor’s Edge*, the novel on which the film that I found the ultimate worldly glamour was based; *A Writer’s Notebook*, which I recalled as being very wise; and, yet again *Cakes and Ale*. Edmund Wilson’s famous explosion at the success of Maugham in general and *The Razor’s Edge* in particular is not so far off the mark:

The language is such a tissue of clichés that one’s wonder is finally aroused at the writer’s ability to assemble so many and at his unfailing inability to put anything in an individual way.

Maugham’s reliance on the banal, particularly in dialogue, derived from his long experience in the theater, a popular art form in those days. One could no more represent the people on stage without clichés than one could an episode of *Dynasty*: Maugham’s dialogue is a slightly sharpened version of that of his audience.

Both Wilde and Shaw dealt in this same sort of realistic speech but Shaw was a master of the high polemic (as well as of the baleful clichés of the quaint workingman, rendered phonetically to no one’s great delight) while Wilde made high verbal art of clichés so slyly crossed as to yield incongruent wit. But for any playwright of that era (now, too), the *mot juste* was apt to be the well-deployed *mot banal*. Maugham’s plays worked very well. But when Maugham transferred the tricks of the theater to novel writing, he was inclined to write not only the same sort of dialogue that the stage required but in his dramatic effects he often set his scene with stage directions, ignoring the possibilities that prose without dialogue can yield. This economy won him many readers, but there is no rapture, song. Wilson finally, puts him in the relation of Bulwer-Lytton to Dickens: “a half-trashy novelist who writes badly, but is patronized by half-serious readers who do not care much about writing.” What ever happened to those readers? How can we get them back?

Wilson took the proud modernist view that, with sufficient education, everyone would want to move into Axel’s Castle. Alas, the half-serious readers stopped reading novels long ago while the “serious” read literary theory, and the castle’s ruins are the domain of literary archaeologists. But Wilson makes a point, inadvertently: If Maugham is half-trashy (and at times his most devoted admirers would probably grant that) what, then, is the other half, that is not trash? Also, why is it that just as one places, with the right hand, the laurel wreath upon his brow, one’s left hand starts to defoliate the victor’s crown?

A Writer’s Notebook (kept over fifty years) is filled with descriptions of sunsets and people glimpsed on the run. These descriptions are every bit as bad as Wilson’s (in *The Twenties*) and I don’t see where either thought that writing down a fancy description of a landscape could—or should—be later glued to the page of a novel in progress. Maugham’s descriptions, like Wilson’s, are disagreeably purple while the physical descriptions of people are more elaborate than what we now put up with. But Maugham was simply following the custom of nineteenth-century novelists in telling us whether or not eyebrows grow together while noting the exact placement of a wen. Also, Dr. Maugham’s checklist is necessary for diagnosis. Yet he does brood on style; attempts to make epigrams. “Anyone can tell the truth, but only very few of us can make epigrams.” Thus, young Maugham, to which the old Maugham retorts, “In the nineties, however, we all tried to.”

In the preface, Maugham expatiates on Jules Renard's notebooks, one of the the great delights of world literature and, as far as I can tell, unknown to Anglo-Americans, like so much else. Renard wrote one small masterpiece, *Poil de Carotte*, about his unhappy childhood—inhuman bondage to an evil mother rather than waitress.

Renard appeals to Maugham, though “I am always suspicious of a novelist's theories, I have never known them to be anything other than a justification of his own shortcomings.” Well, that is commonsensical. In any case, Maugham, heartened by Renard's marvelous notebook, decided to publish his own. The tone is world-weary, modest. “I have retired from the hurly-burly and ensconced myself not uncomfortably on the shelf.” Thus, he will share his final musings.

There is a good deal about writing. High praise for Jeremy Taylor:

He seems to use the words that come most naturally to the mouth, and his phrases, however nicely turned, have a colloquial air. . . . The long clauses, tacked on to one another in a string that appears interminable, make you feel that the thing has been written without effort.

Here, at twenty-eight, he is making the case for the plain and the flat and the natural sounding:

There are a thousand epithets with which you may describe the sea. The only one which, if you fancy yourself a stylist, you will scrupulously avoid is *blue*; yet it is that which most satisfies Jeremy Taylor. . . . He never surprises. His imagination is without violence or daring.

Of Matthew Arnold's style, “so well suited to irony and wit, to exposition. . . . It is a method rather than an art, no one more than I can realize what enormous labour it must have needed to acquire that mellifluous cold brilliance. It is a platitude that simplicity is the latest acquired of all qualities. . . . The interesting giveaway here is Maugham's assumption that Arnold's style must have been the work of great labor. But suppose, like most good writers, the style was absolutely natural to Arnold and without strain? Here one sees the hard worker sternly shaping himself rather than the natural writer easily expressing himself as temperament requires:

My native gifts are not remarkable, but I have a certain force of character which has enabled me in a measure to supplement my deficiencies. I have common sense. . . . For many years I have been described as a cynic; I told the truth. I wish no one to take me for other than I am, and on the other hand I see no need to accept others' pretenses.

One often encounters the ultimate accolade “common sense” in these musings. Also, the conceit that he is what you see, when, in fact, he is not. For instance, his native gifts for narrative were of a very high order. While, up to a point, he could tell the truth and so be thought cynical, it was always “common sense,” a.k.a. careerism, that kept him from ever saying all that he knew. Like most people, he wanted to be taken for what he was not; hence, the great invention W. Somerset Maugham.

COMMENTARY

**BY
THEODORE DREISER
GRAHAM GREENE**

**AS A REALIST SEES IT
THEODORE DREISER**

Sometimes in retrospect of a great book the mind falters, confused by the multitude and yet the harmony of the detail, the strangeness of the frettings, the brooding, musing intelligence that has foreseen, loved, created, elaborated, perfected, until, in this middle ground which we call life somewhere between nothing and nothing, hangs the perfect thing which we love and cannot understand, but which we are compelled to confess a work of art. It is at once something and nothing, a dream, a happy memory, a song, a benediction. In viewing it one finds nothing to criticise or regret. The thing sings, it has color. It has rapture. You wonder at the loving, patient care which has evolved it.

Only recently I finished reading Mr. W. Somerset Maugham's *Of Human Bondage*. It was with some such feeling as this that I laid it down.

Here is a novel or biography or autobiography or social transcript of the utmost importance. To begin with it is unmoral, as a novel of this kind must necessarily be. The hero is born with a club foot and in consequence, and because of a temperament delicately attuned to the miseries of life, suffers all the pains, recessions, and involute self tortures which only those who have striven handicapped by what they have considered a blighting defect can understand. He is a youth, therefore, with an intense craving for sympathy and understanding. He must have it. The thought of his lack and the part which his disability plays in it soon becomes an obsession. He is tortured, miserable.

In pursuit of his ideal from his earliest youth he clings to both men and women in a pathetic way, a truly moving spectacle. The story begins at the home of his mother in or near London. She is dying and among the last things she does is to feel the deformed foot of her son, with what thoughts we may well imagine. Later in the home of his uncle, William Carey, vicar of Blackstable in Kent, we find him suffering for want of sympathy and concealing his shyness and desire behind a veil of assumed indifference. By Carey and his wife he is fostered in a somewhat stern way until his schooldays at Tercenbury begin. There he is tortured by unfeeling playmates, unconscious of the agony which his deformity causes him, until he is ready to leave for a higher school, and presumably prepare himself for the ministry.

Study, and an innate opposition to the life, decide him to leave and go to Heidelberg, Germany, where apparently he remains for a year and rids himself of all his early religious beliefs. A little later he returns to England uncertain as to his career, and enters the office of a chartered accountant in London, for which privilege he pays. If anyone has ever given a better description of English clerical life I am not aware of it. After a year he gives this up, finding himself unsuited to it, and essays another of the suggestions and enthusiasms of certain friends impelling him to it. Two years of the Latin Quarter in Paris, and the fierce discussions which rage around the newer movements in art make it clear to him that he is unsuited for that field, and with a sense of defeat he gives it up. A few months later he enters

a medical school in London with a view to becoming a physician. It is here that his loneliness and his passion for sympathy drive him into a weird relationship with a waitress in an A B C restaurant in London which eventually eats up the remainder of his small fortune of twelve hundred pounds. Finally, penniless and destitute, sleeping on park benches for days, he is compelled to enter a London shop as a clerk. . . .

Curiously the story rises to no spired climax. To some it has apparently appealed as a drama, an unrelieved narrative. To me at least it is a gorgeous weave, as interesting and valuable at the beginning as at the end. There is material in its three hundred thousand and more words for many novels and indeed several philosophies, and even a religion or stoic hope. There are a series of women of course—drab, pathetic, enticing as the case may be—who lead him through the mazes of sentimentality, sex, love, pity, passion, a wonderful series of portraits and of incidents. There are a series of men, friends of a peculiarly inclusive range of intellectuality and taste, who lead him, or whom he leads, through all the intricacies of art, philosophy, criticism, humor. And lastly comes life itself, the great land and sea of people, England, Germany, France, battering, corroding, illuminating, a Goyaesque world.

Naturally I asked myself how such a book would be received in America, in England. In the latter country I was sure, with its traditions of the *Athenaeum* and the *Saturday Review*, it would be adequately appreciated. Imagine my surprise to find that the English reviews were almost uniformly contemptuous and critical on moral and social grounds. The hero was a weakling, not for a moment to be tolerated by sound, right-thinking men. On the other hand in America the reviewers for the most part have seen its true merits and stated them. Need I say, however, that the *New York World* finds “the sentimental servitude of a poor fool”; or that the *Philadelphia Press* sees fit to dub it “futile as Philip” or that the *Outlook* feels that “the author might have made his book true without making it so frequently distasteful”; or that the *Dial* cries, “a most depressing impression of the futility of life”; or “No brilliancy of style,” mourns the *Detroit Times*. “Young folks are warned off,” urges the *Portland Oregonian*. (As if that young person could be induced to examine so profound and philosophic work!) “Certainly the story cannot be said to be in any sense a wholesome one, and it would require a distinctly morbid taste for one to enjoy it thoroughly.” (Note the “thoroughly”). This from the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*. “One longs after reading these novels where spineless men and women yield without a struggling to the forces of evil”—but I cannot go on. It is too trite. You must judge for yourself how the reviewer on the *Saturday Evening Post* of Burlington, Ia., felt about it.

Despite these dissonant voices it is still a book of the utmost import, and has so been received. Compact of the experiences, the dreams, the hopes, the fears, the disillusionments, the ruptures, and the philosophisings of a strangely starved soul, it is a beacon light by which the wanderer may be guided. Nothing is left out; the author writes as though it were a labor of love. It bears the imprint of an eager, almost consuming desire to say truly what is in his heart.

Personally I found myself aching with pain when, yearning for sympathy, Philip begs the wretched Mildred, never his mistress but on his level, to no more than tolerate him. He finally humiliates himself to the extent of exclaiming, “You don’t know what it means to be a cripple!” The pathos of it plumbs the depths. The death of Fannie Price, of the sixteen-year-old mother in the slum, Cronshaw, and the rambling agonies of old Ducroz and of Philip himself, are perfect in their appeal.

There are many other and all equally brilliant pictures. No one short of a genius could rout the philosophers from their lairs and label them as individuals “tempering life with rules agreeable to themselves,” or could follow Mildred Rogers, waitress of the London A B C restaurant, through all the shabby windings of her tawdry soul. No other than a genius endowed with an immense capacity for understanding and pity could have sympathized with Fannie Price, with her futile and self-destructive art dreams; or old Cronshaw, the wastrel of poetry and philosophy; or M. Ducroz, the worn-out

revolutionary; or Thorne Athelny, the caged grandee of Spain; or Leonard Upjohn, airy master of the art of self-advancement; or Dr. South, the vicar of Blackstable, and his wife—these are masterpiece. They are marvelous portraits; they are as smooth as a Vermeer, as definite as a Hals, as brooding and moving as a Rembrandt. The study of Carey himself, while one sees him more as a medium through which the others express themselves, still registers photographically at times. He is by no means a brooding voice but a definite, active, vigorous character.

If the book can be said to have a fault it will lie for some in its length, 300,000 words, or for other in the peculiar reticence with which the last love affair in the story is handled. Until the coming of Sallie Athelny all has been described with the utmost frankness. No situation, however crude or embarrassing, has been shirked. In the matter of the process by which he arrived at the intimacy which resulted in her becoming pregnant not a word is said. All at once, by a slight frown which she subsequently explains, the truth is forced upon you that there has been a series of intimacies which have not been accounted for. After Mildred Rogers and his relationship with Norah Nesbit it strikes one as strange.

I feel about this book, as I look back on it now, much as old Cronshaw in the story felt about the rug which was to clarify for Carey the meaning of life:

As the weaver elaborated his pattern for no end but the pleasure of his aesthetic sense, so might a man live his life, or, if he was forced to believe that his actions were outside his choosing, so might a man look at his life, that it made a pattern. There was little need to do this or there was little need to do that. It was merely something that he did for his own pleasure. Out of the manifold events of his life, his deeds, his feelings, his thoughts, he might make a design, regular, elaborated, complicated or beautiful; and though it might be no more than an illusion that he had the power of selection, that did not matter; it seemed and so to him it was. In the vast warp of life, with the background to his fancies that there was no meaning and that nothing was important, a man might get a personal satisfaction in selecting the various strands that worked out the pattern. . . . What happened to him now would be one more motive to add to the complexity of the pattern, and when the end approached he would rejoice in its completion. It would be a work of art and it would be none the less beautiful because he alone knew of its existence, and with his death it would at once cease to be.

And so it is, Mr. Maugham, this life of Philip Carey as you have woven it. One feels as though one were sitting before a splendid Shiraz or Daghestan of priceless texture and intricate weave, admiring the feeling, responding sensually to its colors and tones. Or better yet it is as though a symphony of great beauty by a master, Strauss or Beethoven, had just been completed and the bud notes and flower tones were filling the air with their elusive message, fluttering and dying. Mr. Maugham, as I understand it, has written eleven conventional books and as many plays. It may be that for years, as the paragraph quoted suggests, he has lived willing that the large knowledge which this book reveals should remain unseen and even perish with him. For all of that he is none the less a great artist. Vicariously, it seems to me, he has suffered for the joy of the many who are to read after him. By no willing of his own he has been compelled to take life by the hand and go down where there has been little save sorrow and degradation. The cup of gall and wormwood has obviously been lifted to his lips and to the last drop he has been compelled to drink it. Because of this we are enabled to see the rug, woven of the tortures and the delights of a life. We may actually walk and talk with one whose hands and feet have been pierced with nails.

NOTES ON SOMERSET MAUGHAM GRAHAM GREENE

Kinglake once referred to 'that nearly immutable law which compels a man with a pen in his hand to be uttering every now and then some sentiment not his own,' and compared an author with a French peasant under the old *régime*, bound to perform a certain amount of work upon the public highways. I doubt if any author has done—of recent years—less highway labour than Maugham. I say 'of recent years' because, as he himself admits in this summing-up of his life and work,* he passed like other writers through the stage of tutelage—and to the most unlikely people, the translators of the Bible and Jeremy Taylor. That stage lasted longer with Maugham than with most men of equal talent—there was at the heart of his work a humility and a self-distrust rather deadening in their effects, and his stories as late as *The Painted Veil* were a curious mixture of independent judgement, when he was dealing with action, and of clichés, when he was expressing emotion.

**The Summing-Up*

An author of talent is his own best critic—the ability to criticize his own work is inseparably bound up with his talent: it is his talent, and Maugham defines his limitations perfectly: 'I knew that I had no lyrical quality. I had a small vocabulary and no efforts that I could make to enlarge it much available to me. I had little gift of metaphor; the original and striking simile seldom occurred to me,' and in the following passage—which is an excellent example of his hard-won style at its best, clear, colloquial, honest—Maugham relates his limitations to his character:

It did not seem enough merely to write. I wanted to make a pattern of my life, in which writing would be an essential element, but which would include all the other activities proper to man. . . . I had many disabilities. I was small; I had endurance but little physical strength; I stammered; I was shy; I had poor health. I had no facility for games, which play so great a part in the normal life of Englishmen; and I had, whether for any of these reasons or from nature I do not know, an instinctive shrinking from my fellow-men that has made it difficult for me to enter into any familiarity with them. . . . Though in the course of years I have learned to assume an air of heartiness when forced into contact with a stranger, I have never liked anyone at first sight. I do not think I have ever addressed someone I did not know in a railway carriage or spoken to a fellow-passenger on board ship unless he first spoke to me. . . . These are grave disadvantages both to the writer and the man. I have had to make the best of them. I think it was the best I could hope for in the circumstances and with the very limited powers that were granted to me by nature.

'It did not seem enough to me merely to write,' and even in this personal book the author is unwilling to communicate more than belongs to his authorship; he does not, like a professional autobiographer, take us with commercial promptitude into his confidence. His life has contained material for dramatization, and he has used it for fiction. There is the pattern in his writing and we are not encouraged to look for its reverse in life: the hospital career (the public pattern is in *Liza Lambeth*); the secret agent in Geneva (we can turn to *Ashenden*); the traveller—there are many books. The sense of privacy, so rare and attractive a quality in an author, deepens in the bare references to secret service experiences in Russia, just before the Revolution, of which we find no direct trace in his

stories.

The nearest Maugham comes to a confidence is in the description of his religious belief—if you call agnosticism a belief, and the fact that on this subject he is ready to speak to strangers makes one pause. There are signs of muddle, contradictions . . . hints of an inhibition. Otherwise one might trace here the deepest source of his limitations, for creative art seems to remain a function of the religious mind. Maugham the agnostic is forced to minimize—pain, vice, the importance of his fellowmen. He cannot believe in a God who punishes and he cannot therefore believe in the importance of a human action. ‘It is not difficult,’ he writes, ‘to forgive people their sins’—it sounds like charity, but it may be only contempt. In another passage he refers with understandable scorn to writers who are ‘grandiloquent to tell you whether or not a little trollop shall hop into bed with a commonplace young man.’ That is a plot as old as *Troilus and Cressida*, but to the religious sixteenth-century mind there was no such thing as a commonplace young man or an unimportant sin; the creative writers of that time drew human characters with a clarity we have never regained (we had to go to Russia for it later) because they were lit with the glare and significance that war lends. Rob human beings of their heavenly and their infernal importance, and you rob your characters of their individuality. (‘What should a Socialist woman do?’) It has never been Maugham’s characters that we have remembered so much as the narrator, with his contempt for human life, his unhappy honesty.

From *Collected Essays*, 19



FOREWORD

This is a very long novel and I am ashamed to make it longer by writing a preface to it. An author probably the last person who can write fitly of his own work. In this connexion an instructive story told by Roger Martin du Gard, a distinguished French novelist, about Marcel Proust. Proust wanted certain French periodical to publish an important article on his great novel and thinking that no one could write it better than he, sat down and wrote it himself. Then he asked a young friend of his, a man of letters, to put his name to it and take it to the editor. This the young man did, but after a few days the editor sent for him. 'I must refuse your article,' he told him. 'Marcel Proust would never forgive me if I printed a criticism of his work that was so perfunctory and so unsympathetic.' Though authors are touchy about their productions and inclined to resent unfavourable criticism they are seldom self-satisfied. They are conscious how far the work on which they have spent much time and trouble comes short of their conception, and when they consider it are much more vexed with their failure to express this in its completeness than pleased with the passages here and there that they can regard with complacency. Their aim is perfection and they are wretchedly aware that they have not attained it.

I will say nothing then about my book itself, but will content myself with telling the reader of the lines how a novel that has now had a fairly long life, as novels go, came to be written; and if it does not interest him I ask him to forgive me. I wrote it first when, at the age of twenty-three, having taken my medical degrees after five years at St Thomas's Hospital, I went to Seville determined to earn my living as a writer. The manuscript of the book I wrote then still exists, but I have not looked at it since I corrected the typescript, and I have no doubt that it is very immature. I sent it to Fisher Unwin, who had published my first book (while still a medical student I had written a novel called *Liza Lambeth*, which had had something of a success), but he refused to give me the hundred pounds I wanted for it, and none of the other publishers to whom I afterwards submitted it would have it at any price. This distressed me at the time, but now I know that I was fortunate; for if one of them had taken my book (it was called *The Artistic Temperament of Stephen Carey*) I should have lost a subject which I was too young to make proper use of. I was not far enough away from the events I described to make good use of them, and I had not had a number of experiences which later went to enrich the book I finally wrote. Nor had I learnt that it is easier to write of what you know than of what you don't. For instance, I sent my hero to Rouen (which I knew only as an occasional visitor) to learn French, instead of to Heidelberg (where I had been myself) to learn German.

Thus rebuffed I put the manuscript away. I wrote other novels, which were published, and I wrote plays. I became in due course a very successful playwright and determined to devote the rest of my life to the drama. But I reckoned without a force within me that made my resolutions vain. I was happy, I was prosperous, I was busy. My head was full of the plays I wanted to write. I do not know

whether it was that success did not bring me all I had expected or whether it was a natural reaction from it, but I was no sooner firmly established as the most popular dramatist of the day than I began once more to be obsessed by the teeming memories of my past life. They came back to me oppressively, in my sleep, on my walks, at rehearsals, at parties, they became such a burden to me, that made up my mind there was only one way to be free of them and that was to write them all down on paper. After submitting myself for some years to the exigencies of the drama I hankered after the wide liberty of the novel. I knew the book I had in mind would be a long one and I wanted to be undisturbed, so I refused the contracts that managers were eagerly offering me and temporarily retired from the stage. I was then thirty-seven.

For long after I became a writer by profession I spent much time on learning how to write and subjected myself to a very tiresome training in the endeavour to improve my style. But these efforts were abandoned when my plays began to be produced, and when I started to write again it was with a different aim. I no longer sought a jewelled prose and a rich texture, on unavailing attempts to achieve which I had formerly wasted much labour; I sought on the contrary plainness and simplicity. With so much that I wanted to say within reasonable limits I felt that I could not afford to waste words and I set out now with the notion of using only such as were necessary to make my meaning clear. I had no space for ornament. My experience in the theatre had taught me the value of succinctness. I worked unremittingly for two years. I did not know what to call my book and after looking about a great deal I hit upon *Beauty from Ashes*, a quotation from Isaiah, which seemed to me apposite; but learning that this title had been recently used I was obliged to search for another. I chose finally the name of one of the books in Spinoza's *Ethics* and called my novel *Of Human Bondage*. I have a notion that I was one more lucky in finding that I could not use the first title I had thought of.

Of Human Bondage is not an autobiography, but an autobiographical novel; fact and fiction are inextricably mingled; the emotions are my own, but not all the incidents are related as they happened and some of them are transferred to my hero not from my own life but from that of persons with whom I was intimate. The book did for me what I wanted, and when it was issued to the world (the world in the throes of a dreadful war and too much concerned with its own sufferings and fears to bother with the adventures of a creature of fiction) I found myself free from the pains and unhappy recollections that had tormented me. It was very well reviewed; Theodore Dreiser wrote for *The New Republic* a long criticism in which he dealt with it with the intelligence and sympathy that distinguish everything he has ever written; but it looked very much as though it would go the way of the vast majority of novels and be forgotten for ever a few months after its appearance. But, I do not know through what accident, it happened after some years that it attracted the attention of a number of distinguished writers in the United States, and the references they continued to make to it in the press gradually brought it to the notice of the public. To these writers is due the new lease of life that the book was thus given and them must I thank for the success it has continued increasingly to have as the years go by.

OF HUMAN **BONDAGE**

I

The day broke grey and dull. The clouds hung heavily, and there was a rawness in the air that suggested snow. A woman servant came into a room in which a child was sleeping and drew the curtains. She glanced mechanically at the house opposite, a stucco house with a portico, and went to the child's bed.

'Wake up, Philip,' she said.

She pulled down the bed-clothes, took him in her arms, and carried him downstairs. He was only half awake.

'Your mother wants you,' she said.

She opened the door of a room on the floor below and took the child over to a bed in which a woman was lying. It was his mother. She stretched out her arms, and the child nestled by her side. He did not ask why he had been awakened. The woman kissed his eyes, and with thin, small hands felt the warm body through his white flannel nightgown. She pressed him closer to herself.

'Are you sleepy, darling?' she said.

Her voice was so weak that it seemed to come already from a great distance. The child did not answer, but smiled comfortably. He was very happy in the large, warm bed, with those soft arms about him. He tried to make himself smaller still as he cuddled against his mother, and he kissed her sleepily. In a moment he closed his eyes and was fast asleep. The doctor came forward and stood by the bedside.

'Oh, don't take him away yet,' she moaned.

The doctor, without answering, looked at her gravely. Knowing she would not be allowed to keep the child much longer, the woman kissed him again; and she passed her hand down his body till she came to his feet; she held the right foot in her hand and felt the five small toes; and then slowly passed her hand over the left one. She gave a sob.

'What's the matter?' said the doctor. 'You're tired.'

She shook her head, unable to speak, and the tears rolled down her cheeks. The doctor bent down.

'Let me take him.'

She was too weak to resist his wish, and she gave the child up. The doctor handed him back to the nurse.

'You'd better put him back in his own bed.'

'Very well, sir.'

The little boy, still sleeping, was taken away. His mother sobbed now broken-heartedly.

'What will happen to him, poor child?'

The monthly nurse tried to quiet her, and presently, from exhaustion, the crying ceased. The doctor walked to a table on the other side of the room, upon which, under a towel, lay the body of a still-born child. He lifted the towel and looked. He was hidden from the bed by a screen, but the woman guessed what he was doing.

'Was it a girl or a boy?' she whispered to the nurse.

'Another boy.'

The woman did not answer. In a moment the child's nurse came back. She approached the bed.

‘Master Philip never woke up,’ she said.

~~There was a pause. Then the doctor felt his patient’s pulse once more.~~

‘I don’t think there’s anything I can do just now,’ he said. ‘I’ll call again after breakfast.’

‘I’ll show you out, sir,’ said the child’s nurse.

They walked downstairs in silence. In the hall the doctor stopped.

‘You’ve sent for Mrs Carey’s brother-in-law, haven’t you?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘D’you know at what time he’ll be here?’

‘No, sir, I’m expecting a telegram.’

‘What about the little boy? I should think he’d be better out of the way.’

‘Miss Watkin said she’d take him, sir.’

‘Who’s she?’

‘She’s his godmother, sir. D’you think Mrs Carey will get over it, sir?’

The doctor shook his head.

It was a week later. Philip was sitting on the floor in the drawing-room at Miss Watkin's house in Onslow Gardens. He was an only child and used to amusing himself. The room was filled with massive furniture, and on each of the sofas were three big cushions. There was a cushion too in each armchair. All these he had taken and, with the help of the gilt rout chairs, light and easy to move, had made an elaborate cave in which he could hide himself from the Red Indians who were lurking behind the curtains. He put his ear to the floor and listened to the herd of buffaloes that raced across the prairie. Presently, hearing the door open, he held his breath so that he might not be discovered; but a violent hand pulled away a chair and the cushions fell down.

'You naughty boy, Miss Watkin *will* be cross with you.'

'Hulloa, Emma!' he said.

The nurse bent down and kissed him, then began to shake out the cushions, and put them back in their places.

'Am I to come home?' he asked.

'Yes, I've come to fetch you.'

'You've got a new dress on.'

It was in 1885, and she wore a bustle. Her gown was of black velvet, with tight sleeves and sloping shoulders, and the skirt had three large flounces. She wore a black bonnet with velvet strings. She hesitated. The question she had expected did not come, and so she could not give the answer she had prepared.

'Aren't you going to ask how your mamma is?' she said at length.

'Oh, I forgot. How is mamma?'

Now she was ready.

'Your mamma is quite well and happy.'

'Oh, I am glad.'

'Your mamma's gone away. You won't ever see her any more.'

Philip did not know what she meant.

'Why not?'

'Your mamma's in heaven.'

She began to cry, and Philip, though he did not quite understand, cried too. Emma was a tall, big-boned woman, with fair hair and large features. She came from Devonshire and, notwithstanding her many years of service in London, had never lost the breadth of her accent. Her tears increased her emotion, and she pressed the little boy to her heart. She felt vaguely the pity of that child deprived of the only love in the world that is quite unselfish. It seemed dreadful that he must be handed over to strangers. But in a little while she pulled herself together.

'Your Uncle William is waiting in to see you,' she said. 'Go and say good-bye to Miss Watkin, and we'll go home.'

'I don't want to say good-bye,' he answered, instinctively anxious to hide his tears.

'Very well, run upstairs and get your hat.'

He fetched it, and when he came down Emma was waiting for him in the hall. He heard the sound of voices in the study behind the dining-room. He paused. He knew that Miss Watkin and her sister were talking to friends, and it seemed to him—he was nine years old—that if he went in they would be sorry for him.

'I think I'll go and say good-bye to Miss Watkin.'

'I think you'd better,' said Emma.

‘Go in and tell them I’m coming,’ he said.

~~He wished to make the most of his opportunity. Emma knocked at the door and walked in. He heard her speak.~~

‘Master Philip wants to say good-bye to you, miss.’

There was a sudden hush of the conversation, and Philip limped in. Henrietta Watkin was a stout woman, with a red face and dyed hair. In those days to dye the hair excited comment, and Philip had heard much gossip at home when his godmother’s changed colour. She lived with an elder sister, who had resigned herself contentedly to old age. Two ladies, whom Philip did not know, were calling, and they looked at him curiously.

‘My poor child,’ said Miss Watkin, opening her arms.

She began to cry. Philip understood now why she had not been in to luncheon and why she wore a black dress. She could not speak.

‘I’ve got to go home,’ said Philip, at last.

He disengaged himself from Miss Watkin’s arms, and she kissed him again. Then he went to his sister and bade her good-bye too. One of the strange ladies asked if she might kiss him, and he gratefully gave her permission. Though crying, he keenly enjoyed the sensation he was causing; he would have been glad to stay a little longer to be made so much of, but felt they expected him to go, so he said that Emma was waiting for him. He went out of the room. Emma had gone downstairs to speak with her friend in the basement, and he waited for her on the landing. He heard Henrietta Watkin’s voice.

‘His mother was my greatest friend. I can’t bear to think that she’s dead.’

‘You oughtn’t to have gone to the funeral, Henrietta,’ said her sister. ‘I knew it would upset you.’

Then one of the strangers spoke.

‘Poor little boy, it’s dreadful to think of him quite alone in the world. I see he limps.’

‘Yes, he’s got a club-foot. It was such a grief to his mother.’

Then Emma came back. They called a hansom, and she told the driver where to go.

When they reached the house Mrs Carey had died in—it was in a dreary, respectable street between Notting Hill Gate and High Street, Kensington—Emma led Philip into the drawing-room. His uncle was writing letters of thanks for the wreaths which had been sent. One of them, which had arrived too late for the funeral, lay in its cardboard box on the hall-table.

‘Here’s Master Philip,’ said Emma.

Mr Carey stood up slowly and shook hands with the little boy. Then on second thoughts he bent down and kissed his forehead. He was a man of somewhat less than average height, inclined to corpulence, with his hair, worn long, arranged over the scalp so as to conceal his baldness. He was clean-shaven. His features were regular, and it was possible to imagine that in his youth he had been good-looking. On his watch-chain he wore a gold cross.

‘You’re going to live with me now, Philip,’ said Mr Carey. ‘Shall you like that?’

Two years before Philip had been sent down to stay at the vicarage after an attack of chicken-pox, but there remained with him a recollection of an attic and a large garden rather than of his uncle and aunt.

‘Yes.’

‘You must look upon me and your Aunt Louisa as your father and mother.’

The child’s mouth trembled a little, he reddened, but did not answer.

‘Your dear mother left you in my charge.’

Mr Carey had no great ease in expressing himself. When the news came that his sister-in-law was dying, he set off at once for London, but on the way thought of nothing but the disturbance in his life that would be caused if her death forced him to undertake the care of her son. He was well over fifty and his wife, to whom he had been married for thirty years, was childless; he did not look forward with any pleasure to the presence of a small boy who might be noisy and rough. He had never much liked his sister-in-law.

‘I’m going to take you down to Blackstable tomorrow,’ he said.

‘With Emma?’

The child put his hand in hers, and she pressed it.

‘I’m afraid Emma must go away,’ said Mr Carey.

‘But I want Emma to come with me.’

Philip began to cry, and the nurse could not help crying too. Mr Carey looked at them helplessly.

‘I think you’d better leave me alone with Master Philip for a moment.’

‘Very good, sir.’

Though Philip clung to her, she released herself gently. Mr Carey took the boy on his knee and put his arm round him.

‘You mustn’t cry,’ he said. ‘You’re too old to have a nurse now. We must see about sending you to school.’

‘I want Emma to come with me,’ the child repeated.

‘It costs too much money, Philip. Your father didn’t leave very much, and I don’t know what will become of it. You must look at every penny you spend.’

Mr Carey had called the day before on the family solicitor. Philip’s father was a surgeon in good practice, and his hospital appointments suggested an established position; so that it was a surprise on his sudden death from blood-poisoning to find that he had left his widow little more than his life insurance and what could be got from the lease of their house in Bruton Street. This was six months ago; and Mrs Carey, already in delicate health, finding herself with child, had lost her head and

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