

The Knowledge Bank at The Ohio State University

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THE ENGINEER'S BOOKSHELF

By WILSON R. DUMBLE

W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM, probably, has been known to more college students during the last decade than any other living author. On all campuses throughout the country his famous novel, "Of Human Bondage", has been widely read, and if students have not met him through this piece of work, they undoubtedly have read or seen revivals of his famous play, "The Circle", or his equally important short story, "Sadie Thompson". Mr. Maugham's writing has that quality which appeals to students, and when I make that statement I speak from experience.

Mr. Maugham is traveling in this country at the present time. It seemed inevitable; all British writers come to America sooner or later. And this, apparently, is "later" for Mr. Maugham. Since his arrival in New York the middle of January the Saturday Evening Post has published two articles that he has written, and he has appeared—it was a debut, I am told—on the radio, a guest speaker on Rudy Vallee's hour. And what Mr. Maugham has to say, either on the air or on the printed page, is always so well said and so perfectly timed that it generally is worth while.

Therefore, I believe it apt to speak of the two articles that Maugham has recently published in the Post. The first, entitled "Books and You", appeared in the February 4 issue; the second, "You and Some More Books", came along in the March 11 issue.

First of all, I should like to have Mr. Maugham speak for himself, and so I quote from his first article, and let him recount his aim in his choice of books:

"Now the first thing I want to insist on is that reading should be enjoyable. Of course, there are many books that we all have to read, either to pass examinations or to acquire information, from which it is impossible to extract enjoyment. We are reading them for instruction, and the best we can hope is that our need for it will enable us to get through the works we must peruse without tediousness. Such books we read with resignation rather than with alacrity. But that is not the sort of reading I have in mind. The books I shall mention in due course will help you neither to get a degree nor to earn your living, they will not teach you to sail a boat or to get a stalled motor to run, but they will help you to live more fully. That, however, they cannot do unless you enjoy reading them."

In this first article Mr. Maugham confined his suggestions to English authors; in the second, to Continental authors. Before making these suggestions about the books of English authors, he states that he believes that no American should omit Mark Twain's "Huckleberry Finn", nor Melville's "Moby Dick", nor Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass", nor the stories of Edgar Allen Poe.

Space here will not permit, most naturally, to comment about all the English authors that are suggested for reading. I fancy that most students are acquainted with "Vanity Fair" and "David Copperfield", both included by Mr. Maugham. But if that student does not know "Moll Flanders", a realistic account of the courtesan who was "five times a wife and twelve years a thief", he might be interested in reading it. I have discovered that few college students know "Gulliver's Travels", yet it is without doubt, one of the most terrible satires ever written about the human race. Students might even find untold enjoyment in Hazlitt's Essays, especially those published in a volume called "Table Talk", all of them informal and personal comments on literary and other matters. Then too, fascinating is the cruel realism of Sam Butler's "The Way of All Flesh", an incomparable story of a young man who was intelligent enough to hate the hypocrisies of orthodox institutions and yet courageous enough to break away from them. A thrilling book that is both hated and admired, it presents to most people the kind of reading for which Mr. Maugham is driving.

It is interesting to note, I believe, that of the books Mr. Maugham has mentioned and suggested, fourteen are novels, one a biography, one an autobiography, and one a collection of essays. Of the fourteen novels, four were written in the 18th century, eight in the 19th century, and two in the 20th century. He mentions, I believe, only one living author; he is Mr. H. G. Wells. In the biographical suggestions, both books are 18th century productions, and, of course, Mr. Hazlitt's Essays belong to the 19th century.

The following is a list of books that Mr. Maugham recommends for reading for pleasure. The dates indicate the year of publication.

Daniel Defoe: Moll Flanders 1722
Jonathan Swift: Gulliver's Travels 1726
Henry Fielding: Tom Jones 1749
Laurence Sterne: Tristram Shandy 1760
James Boswell: The Life of Samuel Johnson 1791
Edward Gibbon: Autobiography 1793
Charles Dickens: David Copperfield 1849-1850
Samuel Butler: The Way of All Flesh 1903
Jane Austen: Mansfield Park 1814
William Hazlitt: Essays 1821-1822
William M. Thackeray: Vanity Fair 1847-1849
Emily Bronte: Wuthering Heights 1847
George Eliot: Middlemarch 1871-1872
Anthony Trollope: The Eustace Diamonds 1865

Mr. Maugham's list of Continental literature, recommended for pleasure reading, follows:

Cervantes: Don Quixote
Montaigne: Essays
Goethe: Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship and Travels
Turgenev: Fathers and Sons
Tolstoi: War and Peace
Dostoevsky: The Brothers Karamazov
Madame de la LaFayette: The Princess of Cleves
Prevost: Manon Lescaut
"Voltaire": Candide
Rousseau: Confessions
Balzac: Father Goriot
Stendhal: The Red and the Black; The Charterhouse of Parma
Flaubert: Madame Bovary
Benjamin Constant: Adolphe
Dumas: The Three Musketeers
Anatole France: The Mother-of-Pearl Case
Marcel Proust: Remembrance of Things Past
