

SOUTH
WIND
DOUGLAS



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SOUTH WIND

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SOUTH

WIND

BY

NORMAN

DOUGLAS

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NEW YORK**



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INTRODUCTION

IN responding to *The Modern Library's* courteous request that I should write a short prefatory notice to this edition of *South Wind*, I will take the opportunity to answer one or two correspondents who have assumed that my island of Nepenthe is that of Capri near Naples—and this, in spite of the fact that Nepenthe is described in the very first chapter as being near Africa. They write, for instance, "the real Capri is not the Capri I was led to expect from your book;" or else, "I don't see any traces of the hot springs you mention;" or, still more pointedly, "Damned if I can trace much likeness between the two."

Of course there is not much likeness between them. The island of Capri is real, and Nepenthe is two-thirds imaginary. And the remaining third of it is distilled out of several Mediterranean islands; it is a composite place. Certain social features, as well as the prevalence of the sirocco, are—or were—fairly true of Capri; the hot springs and their medicinal virtues have been concocted out of old Iasolini's funny account of the island of Ischia (1588); the volcanic cliff-scenery and all the peculiar mineralogical characteristics are those of the island of Ponza concerning which, in days gone by, I wrote an illustrated article and sent it to the editor of *Scribner's Magazine* who was kind enough to pay me, though he never printed what I had written; I can also detect, here and there, reminiscences of the Lipari islands, such as the decayed bathing establishment mentioned in Chapter XXVII which was inspired by the then abandoned baths of San Calogero on Lipari, and the local pumice-stone industry (p. 99) in the village of Canneto where they used

to carry monstrous blocks of this light material down the mountainside on their backs, before mechanical means of transport were introduced.

The same with the personages. Several friends, who know Capri well, declare that they have "identified everybody in the book, including yourself." Clever people! To the best of my knowledge, the characters of Caloveglia, van Koppen, the "good Duke," Eames, Keith and Don Francesco (the only respectable person in the whole crowd: and I take some credit to myself for making him a Roman Catholic priest) are pure inventions. I have never met men of this kind; I should like to do so. In the case of others, some memories may well have been floating at the back of my mind. Bashakuloff, for example, is obviously derived from Rasputin and another holy Russian impostor whose name I cannot recall; I must also confess that Signor Malipizzo is meant for an unflattering portrait of the then existing magistrate on Capri, a red-haired ruffian called Capolozzi, who nearly had me in the lock-up once or twice; this caricature was the best I could do, by way of being square with him. The bishop, as I have elsewhere explained, is merely a dummy contrived to reflect the moods of what I took to be the average reader.

And Miss Wilberforce—what of her? A lady wrote me that I painted her "with so much feeling" that she could not be anything but a near connection of my own family. I wish she were! As a matter of fact, Miss Wilberforce has been put together out of some twelve dames of that particular alcoholic temperament whom it has been my privilege to know, and each of whom has contributed her mite; she is a synthetic lady-sot—a type I fervently pray God may never die out. One of her dozen ingredients moved in the upper strata of English society and was so passionately addicted to strong waters that it became a doubtful pleasure to sit next to her at a dinner table or anywhere else. And yet, alas, she never

indulged in Miss Wilberforce's playful habit of divesting herself of her raiment on occasion. I suppose she thought that an Ambassadors should draw the line somewhere. Which was a pity.

I will only add, as a conclusion to this absurdly egotistical preface, and to console anyone who proposes to write books of this kind, that the critics were not encouraging, not very encouraging. Many reviewers declared themselves unable to find the slightest semblance of a "plot" in *South Wind*, which annoyed me so furiously that in a subsequent book called *Alone* I told them what I thought of them and their perspicacity and proved, to my own complete satisfaction, that *South Wind* is nothing but plot from beginning to end. Again: a well-known London paper observed blandly that "Readers with time on their hands might give it a trial." Now I call that a damper. And it strikes me that Mr. Liveright must be a bold man, for in putting this book into his Modern Library Series he seems to take it for granted that there must be a considerable number of readers with time on their hands, ready to "give it a trial" in America.

I hope he is not mistaken.

Norman Douglas

December 15, 1924.

INTRODUCTIONS

included in Miss Wilton's paper but I do not send
herself of her opinion on the subject. I suppose she thought
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**A LETTER TO THE AUTHOR FROM
PROFESSOR SAINTSBURY**

(Printed by permission.)

February 23, 1921

Dear Sir,

Permit me to be tedious, as well as illegible. I am seventy-five. I have read more novels than a man of seven hundred and fifty ought to have done. For some twenty years I used to review hundreds or thereabouts of English and scores of French as they came out. For another twenty, the first of this so-called age, I have come across just two new novelists who have given me something that I can recommend to a friend. The author of "South Wind" is the second in order of time, not rank.

I am,

Yours very truly,

George
George Saintsbury

December 15, 1921

SOUTH WIND

WWW.ERTONG.

SOUTH WIND

CHAPTER I

THE bishop was feeling rather sea-sick. Confoundedly sea-sick, in fact.

This annoyed him. For he disapproved of sickness in every shape or form. His own state of body was far from satisfactory at that moment; Africa—he was Bishop of Bampopo in the Equatorial Regions—had played the devil with his lower gastric department and made him almost an invalid; a circumstance of which he was nowise proud, seeing that ill-health led to inefficiency in all walks of life. There was nothing he despised more than inefficiency. Well or ill, he always insisted on getting through his tasks in a businesslike fashion. That was the way to live, he used to say. Get through with it. Be perfect of your kind, whatever that kind may be. Hence his sneaking fondness for the natives—they were such fine, healthy animals.

Fine, healthy animals; perfect of their kind! Africa liked them to “get through with it” according to their own lights. But there was evidently a little touch of spitefulness and malice about Africa; something almost human. For when white people try to get through with it after their particular fashion, she makes hay of their livers or something. That is what had happened to Thomas Heard, D.D., Bishop of Bampopo. He had been so perfect of his kind, such an exemplary pastor, that there was small chance of a return to the scenes of his episcopal labours. Anybody could have told him what would happen. He ought to have allowed for a little human weakness, on the

part of the Black Continent. It could not be helped. For the rest, he was half inclined to give up the Church and take to some educational work on his return to England. Perhaps that was why he at present preferred to be known as "Mr. Heard." It put people at their ease, and him too.

Whence now this novel and unpleasant sensation in the upper gastric region? Most annoying! He had dined discreetly at his hotel the evening before; had breakfasted with moderation. And had he not voyaged in many parts of the world, in China Seas and round the Cape? Was he not even then on his return journey from Zanzibar? No doubt. But the big liner which deposited him yesterday at the thronged port was a different concern from this wretched tub, reeking with indescribable odours as it rolled in the oily swell of the past storm through which the *Mozambique* had ridden without a tremor. The benches, too, were frightfully uncomfortable, and sticky with sirocco moisture under the breathless awning. Above all, there was the unavoidable spectacle of the suffering passengers, natives of the country; it infected him with misery. In attitudes worthy of Michelangelo they sprawled about the deck, groaning with anguish; huddled up in corners with a lemon—prophylactic against seasickness, apparently—pressed to faces which, by some subtle process of colour-adaptation, had acquired the complexion of the fruit; tottering to the taffrail. . . .

There was a peasant woman dressed in black, holding an infant to her breast. Both child and parent suffered to a distressing degree. By some kindly dispensation of Providence they contrived to be ill in turns, and the situation might have verged on the comical but for the fact that blank despair was written on the face of the mother. She evidently thought her last day had come, and still, in the convulsions of her pain, tried to soothe the child. An ungainly creature, with a big scar across one cheek. She suffered dumbly, like some poor animal. The bishop's heart went out to her. . . .

He took out his watch. Two more hours of discomfort to be gone through! Then he looked over the water. The goal was far distant.

Viewed from the clammy deck on this bright morning, the island of Nepenthe resembled a cloud. It was a silvery speck upon that limitless expanse of blue sea and sky. A south wind breathed over the Mediterranean waters, drawing up their moisture which lay couched in thick mists about its flanks and uplands. The comely outlines were barely suggested through a veil of fog. An air of irreality hung about the place. Could this be an island? A veritable island of rocks and vineyards and houses—this pallid apparition? It looked like some snowy sea-bird resting upon the waves; a sea-bird or a cloud; one of those lonely clouds that stray from their fellows and drift about in wayward fashion at the bidding of every breeze.

All the better-class natives had disappeared below save an unusually fat young priest with a face like a full moon, who pretended to be immersed in his breviary but was looking out of the corner of his eye all the time at a pretty peasant girl reclining uncomfortably in a corner. He rose and arranged the cushions to her liking. In doing so he must have made some funny remark in her ear, for she smiled wanly as she said:

“Grazie, Don Francesco.”

“Means thank you, I suppose,” thought the bishop. “But why is he a don?”

Of the other alien travellers, those charming but rather metallic American ladies had retired to the cabin; so had the English family; so had everybody, in fact. On deck there remained of the foreign contingent nobody but himself and Mr. Muhlen, a flashy over-dressed personage who seemed to relish the state of affairs. He paced up and down, cool as a cucumber, trying to walk like a sailor, and blandly indifferent to the agonized fellow-creatures whom the movements of the vessel caused him to touch, every now and then, with the point of his patent-leather boots.

Patent-leather boots. That alone classes him, thought Mr. Heard. Once he paused and remarked, in his horrible pronunciation of English:

"That woman over there with the child! I wonder what I would do in her place? Throw it into the water, I fancy. It's often the only way of getting rid of a nuisance."

"Rather a violent measure," replied the bishop politely.

"You're not feeling very well, sir?" he continued, with a fine assumption of affability. "I am so sorry. As for me, I like a little movement of the boat. You know our proverb? Weeds don't spoil. I'm alluding to myself, of course!"

Weeds don't spoil. . . .

Yes, he was a weed. Mr. Heard had not taken kindly to him; he hoped they would not see too much of each other on Nepenthe, which he understood to be rather a small place. A few words of civility over the table d'hôte had led to an exchange of cards—a continental custom which Mr. Heard always resented. It could not easily be avoided in the present case. They had talked of Nepenthe, or rather Mr. Muhlen had talked; the bishop, as usual, preferring to listen and to learn. Like himself, Mr. Muhlen had never before set foot on the place. To be sure, he had visited other Mediterranean islands; he knew Sicily fairly well and had once spent a pleasant fortnight on Capri. But Nepenthe was different. The proximity to Africa, you know; the volcanic soil. Oh yes! It was obviously quite another sort of island. Business? No! He was not bound on any errand of business; not on any errand at all. Just a little pleasure trip. One owes something to one's self: *n'est-ce pas?* And this early summer was certainly the best time for travelling. One could count on good weather; one could sleep in the afternoon, if the heat were excessive. He had telegraphed for a couple of rooms in what was described as the best hotel—he hoped the visitors staying there would be to his liking.

Unfortunately—so he gathered—the local society was a little mixed, a little—how shall we say?—ultra-cosmopolitan. The geographical situation of the island, lying near the converging point of many trade-routes, might account for this. And then its beauty and historical associations: they attracted strange tourists from every part of the world. Queer types! Types to be avoided, perhaps. But what did it matter, after all? It was one of the advantages of being a man, a civilized man, that you could amuse yourself among any class of society. As for himself, he liked the common people, the peasants and fishermen; he felt at home among them; they were so genuine, so refreshingly different.

To suchlike ingratiating and rather obvious remarks the bishop had listened, over the dinner table, with urbane acquiescence and growing distrust. Peasants and fisher folks! This fellow did not look as if he cared for such company. He was probably a fraud.

They had met again in the evening, and taken a short stroll along the quay where a noisy band was discoursing operatic airs. The performance elicited from Mr. Muhlen some caustic comments on Latin music as contrasted with that of Russia and other countries. He evidently knew the subject. Mr. Heard, to whom music was Greek, soon found himself out of his depths. Later on, in the smoking-room, they had indulged in a game of cards—the bishop being of that broadminded variety which has not the slightest objection to a gentlemanly gamble. Once more his companion had revealed himself as an accomplished amateur.

No; it was something else that annoyed him about the man—certain almost contemptuous remarks he had dropped in the course of the evening on the subject of the female sex; not any particular member of it, but the sex in general. Mr. Heard was sensitive on that point. He was not disheartened by experience. He had never allowed his judgment to be warped by those degrading

aspects of womanhood which he had encountered during his work among the London poor, and more recently in Africa, where women are treated as the veriest beasts. He kept his ideals bright. He would tolerate no flippant allusions to the sex. Muhlen's talk had left a bad taste in his mouth.

And here he was, prancing up and down, sublimely pleased with himself. Mr. Heard watched his perambulations with mixed feelings—moral disapproval combining with a small grain of envy at the fellow's conspicuous immunity from the prevailing sea-sickness.

A weed; unquestionably a weed.

Meanwhile, the mainland slowly receded. Morning wore on, and under the fierce attraction of the sun the fogs were drawn upwards. Nepenthe became tangible—an authentic island. It gleamed with golden rocks and emerald patches of culture. A cluster of white houses, some town or village, lay perched on the middle heights where a playful sunbeam had struck a pathway through the vapours. The curtain was lifted. Half lifted; for the volcanic peaks and ravines overhead were still shrouded in pearly mystery.

The fat priest looked up from his breviary and smiled in friendly fashion.

"I heard you speak English to that person," he began, with hardly a trace of foreign accent. "You will pardon me. I see you are unwell. May I get you a lemon? Or perhaps a glass of cognac?"

"I am feeling better, thank you. It must have been the sight of those poor people that upset me. They seem to suffer horribly. I suppose I have got used to it."

"They do suffer. And they get used to it too. I often wonder whether they are as susceptible to pain and discomfort as the rich with their finer nervous structure. Who can say? Animals also have their sufferings, but they are not encouraged to tell us about them. Perhaps