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Norman Douglas South Wind





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THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY

Oscar Wilde

The portrait which Basil Hallward painted of Dorian Gray revealed the face of an Adonis, and when he saw the finished picture of himself, the beautiful young aesthete exclaimed: 'Why should it keep what I must lose? Every moment that passes takes something from me, and gives something to it. Oh, if it were only the other way! If the picture could change and I could be always what I am now!' His perverse aspiration was strangely fulfilled. Abandoning himself to every sin which his profligate mind could devise, the wealthy and exquisite young man brought misery and disgrace on all who accepted his companionship, but Dorian Gray still wore the outward appearance of serene beauty. It was upon the portrait, locked away in his attic, that the marks of degeneration mysteriously appeared, for the painting of Adonis slowly transformed into the likeness of a satyr.

This celebrated fantasy is developed as vividly as one of Edgar Allan Poe's macabre narratives, and the climax is fulfilled in murder and suicide. But although *The Picture of Dorian Gray* ranks as a tense and full-blooded story, it is distinguished also by the habitual brilliance of Oscar Wilde's witty and epigrammatic style.

A HIGH WIND IN JAMAICA

Richard Hughes

A classic novel of childhood.

The reactions of a family of children thrown into the company of pirates are recorded with unparalleled exactness and compassion. Hughes's evocations of childhood, of the tropical landscape and the sea, give this novel a hallucinated quality. But the events it describes are as savage and as haunting as those portrayed in *Lord of the Flies*.

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WHISKY GALORE

Compton Mackenzie

Hitler's at the gate, but it's whisky that worries them in the Outer Hebrides. When the S.S. 'Cabinet Minister', carrying fifty thousand cases of the golden liquor, strikes a reef, it's *Whisky Galore* for the islanders, in a story that gives full scope to the hilarious wit of Compton Mackenzie.

Not for sale in the U.S.A.

PENGUIN MODERN CLASSICS

SOUTH WIND

Norman Douglas was born in 1868, educated at Uppingham and in Germany and spent some early years in the Diplomatic Service, chiefly in St Petersburg and Naples. The publication of *Siren Land* in 1911 first brought him to the notice of the public as a writer of individuality and unusual distinction. Two further travel books followed in quick succession, *Fountains in the Sand* (1912) and *Old Calabria* (1915), but it was his novel *South Wind*, published in 1917, which made his name widely known to two continents, and this is now accepted as a fiction classic. Although, or because, his output was a limited one he holds a unique position in the literature of our time. He died in 1952.

SOUTH WIND

NORMAN DOUGLAS



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CHAPTER 1

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 business-like 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 sea-sickness, 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 unreality 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’hote* had led to an exchange of cards – a continental custom 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 in 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 such-like ingratiating and rather obvious remarks the bishop had listened, over the dinner-table, with urbane acquiescence and growing distrust. Peasants and fisher-folk! 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 depth. Later on, in the smoking-room, they had indulged in a game of cards – the bishop being of the broad-minded 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 judgement 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 seasickness.

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 that is why God made them dumb. Zola, in one of his novels, speaks of a sea-sick donkey.'

'Dear me!' said Mr Heard. It was an old-fashioned trick he had got from his mother. 'Dear me!'

He wondered what this youthful ecclesiastic was doing with Zola. In fact, he was slightly shocked. But he never allowed such a state of affairs to be noticed.

'You like Zola?' he queried.

'Not much. He is rather a dirty dog, and his technique is so ridiculously transparent. But one can't help respecting the man. If I were to read this class of literature for my own amusement I would prefer, I think, Catulle Mendès. But I don't. I read it, you understand, in order to be able to penetrate into the minds of my penitents, many of whom refuse to deprive themselves of such books. Women are so influenced by what they read! Personally, I am not very fond of improper writers. And yet they sometimes make one laugh in spite of oneself, don't they? I perceive you are feeling better.'

Mr Heard could not help saying:

'You express yourself very well in English.'

'Oh, passably! I have preached to large congregations of Catholics in the United States. In England, too. My mother was English. The Vatican has been pleased to reward the poor labours of my tongue by the title of Monsignor.'

'My congratulations. You are rather young for a Monsignor,

are you not? We are apt to associate that distinction with snuff-boxes and gout and —'

'Thirty-nine. It is a good age. One begins to appreciate things at their true value. Your collar! Might I inquire —?'

'Ah, my collar; the last vestige. . . . Yes, I am a bishop. Bishop of Bampopo in Central Africa.'

'You are rather young, surely, for a bishop?'

Mr Heard smiled.

'The youngest on the list, I believe. There were not many applicants for the place; the distance from England, the hard work, and the climate, you know —'

'A bishop. Indeed!'

He waxed thoughtful. Probably he imagined that his companion was telling him some traveller's tale.

'Yes,' continued Mr Heard. 'I am what we call a "Returned Empty". It is a phrase we apply in England to Colonial bishops who come back from their dioceses.'

'Returned Empty! That sounds like beer.'

The priest was looking perplexed, as though uncertain of the other's state of mind. Southern politeness, or curiosity, overcame his fears. Perhaps this foreigner was fond of joking. Well, he would humour him.

'You will see our bishop to-morrow,' he pursued blandly. 'He comes over for the feast of the patron saint; you are lucky in witnessing it. The whole island is decorated. There will be music and fireworks and a grand procession. Our bishop is a dear old man, though not exactly what you would call a liberal,' he added, with a laugh. 'That is as it should be, is it not? We like our elders to be conservative. They counteract the often violent modernism of the youngsters. Is this your first visit to Nepenthe?'

'It is. I have heard much about the beauty of the place.'

'You will like it. The people are intelligent. There is good food and wine. Our lobsters are celebrated. You will find compatriots on the island, some ladies among them: the Duchess of San Martino, for instance, who happens to be an American; some delightful ladies! And the country girls, too, are worthy of a benevolent glance —'

'That procession is sure to interest me. What is the name of your patron?'

'Saint Dodekanus. He has a wonderful history. There is an Englishman on Nepenthe, Mr Ernest Eames, a student, who will tell you all about it. He knows more about the saint than I do; one would think he dined with him every evening. But he is a great

hermit – Mr Eames, I mean. And it is so good of our old bishop to come over,' he pursued with a shade of emphasis. 'His work keeps him mostly on the mainland. He has a large see – nearly thirty square miles. How large, by the way, is your diocese?'

'I cannot give you the exact figures,' Mr Heard replied. 'It has often taken me three weeks to travel from one end to the other. It is probably not much smaller than the kingdom of Italy.'

'The kingdom of Italy. Indeed!'

That settled it. The conversation died abruptly; the friendly priest relapsed into silence. He looked hurt and disappointed. This was more than a joke. He had done his best to be civil to a suffering foreigner, and this was his reward – to be fooled with the grossest of fables. Maybe he remembered other occasions when Englishmen had developed a queer sense of humour which he utterly failed to appreciate. A liar. Or possibly a lunatic; one of those harmless enthusiasts who go about the world imagining themselves to be the Pope or the Archangel Gabriel. However that might be, he said not another word, but took to reading his breviary in good earnest, for the first time.

The boat anchored. Natives poured out in a stream. Mr Muhlen drove up alone, presumably to his sumptuous hotel. The bishop, having gathered his luggage together, followed in another carriage. He enjoyed the drive along that winding upward track; he admired the festal decorations of the houses, the gardens and vineyards, the many-tinted rock scenery overhead, the smiling sun-burnt peasantry. There was an air of contentment and well-being about the place; something joyful, opulent, almost dramatic.

'I like it,' he concluded.

And he wondered how long it would be before he met his cousin, Mrs Meadows, on whose account he had undertaken to break the journey to England.

Don Francesco, the smiling priest, soon outstripped both of them, in spite of ten minutes' conversation on the quay with the pretty peasant girl of the steamer. He had engaged the fastest driver on the island, and was now tearing frantically up the road, determined to be the first to apprise the Duchess of the lunatic's arrival.

CHAPTER 2

THE Duchess of San Martino, a kind-hearted and imposing lady of mature age who, under favourable atmospheric conditions (in winter-time, for instance, when the powder was not so likely to

run down her face), might have passed, so far as profile was concerned, for a faded French beauty of bygone centuries – the Duchess was no exception to the rule.

It was an old rule. Nobody knew when it first came into vogue. Mr Eames, bibliographer of Nepenthe, had traced it down to the second Phoenician period, but saw no reason why the Phoenicians, more than anybody else, should have established the precedent. On the contrary, he was inclined to think that it dated from yet earlier days; days when the Troglodytes, Manigones, Septocardes, Merdones, Anthropophagoi, and other hairy aboriginals used to paddle across, in crazy canoes, to barter the produce of their savage, African glens – serpent-skins, and gums, and gazelle horns, and ostrich eggs – for those super-excellent lobsters and peasant girls for which Nepenthe had been renowned from time immemorial. He based this scholarly conjecture on the fact that a gazelle horn, identified as belonging to a now extinct Tripolitan species, was actually discovered on the island, while an adolescent female skull of the hypodolichocephalous (Nepenthean) type had come to light in some excavations at Benghazi.

It was a pleasant rule. It ran to the effect that in the course of the forenoon all the inhabitants of Nepenthe, of whatever age, sex, or condition, should endeavour to find themselves in the market-place or piazza – a charming square, surrounded on three sides by the principal buildings of the town, and open on the fourth to a lovely prospect over land and sea. They were to meet on this spot; there to exchange gossip, make appointments for the evening, and watch the arrival of new-comers to their island. An admirable rule! For it effectively prevented everybody from doing any kind of work in the morning; and after luncheon, of course, you went to sleep. It was delightful to be obliged, by iron convention, to stroll about in the bright sunshine, greeting your friends, imbibing iced drinks and letting your eye stray down to the lower level of the island, with its farmhouses embowered in vineyards; or across the glittering water towards the distant coastline and its volcano; or upwards, into those pinnacles of the higher region against whose craggy ramparts, nearly always, a fleet of snowy sirocco clouds was anchored. For Nepenthe was famous not only for its girls and lobsters, but also for its south wind.

As usual at this hour, the market-place was crowded with folks. It was a gay throng. Priests and curly-haired children, farmers, fishermen, citizens, a municipal policeman or two, brightly dressed women of all ages, foreigners in abundance – they moved up and