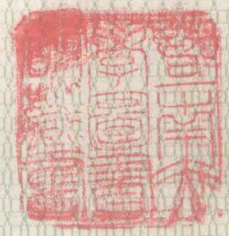
W. Somerset Maugham

OF HUMAN BONDAGE



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PENGUIN BOOKS

OF HUMAN BONDAGE

William Somerset Maugham was born in 1874 and lived in Paris until he was ten. He was educated at King's School, Canterbury, and at Heidelberg University. He afterwards walked the wards of St Thomas's Hospital with a view to practice in medicine, but the success of his first novel, *Liza of Lambeth* (1897), won him over to letters. Something of his hospital experience is reflected, however, in the first of his masterpieces, *Of Human Bondage* (1915), and with *The Moon and Sixpence* (1919) his reputation as a novelist was assured.

His position as one of the most successful playwrights on the London stage was being consolidated simultaneously. His first play, *A Man of Honour* (1903), was followed by a procession of successes just before and after the First World War. (At one point only Bernard Shaw had more plays running at the same time in London.) His theatre career ended with *Sheppey* (1933).

His fame as a short-story writer began with *The Trembling of a Leaf*, sub-titled *Little Stories of the South Sea Islands*, in 1921, after which he published more than ten collections.

Somerset Maugham's general books are fewer in number. They include travel books, such as *On a Chinese Screen* (1922) and *Don Fernando* (1935), essays, criticism, and the self-revealing *The Summing Up* (1938) and *A Writer's Notebook* (1949).

Somerset Maugham became a Companion of Honour in 1954. He died in 1965.

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FOREWORD

THIS is a very long novel and I am ashamed to make it longer by writing a preface to it. An author is probably the last person who can write fitly of his own work. In this connexion an instructive story is told by Roger Martin du Gard, a distinguished French novelist, about Marcel Proust. Proust wanted a 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 these 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 of 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 so pressingly, in my sleep, on my walks, at rehearsals, at parties, they became such a burden to me, that I 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 I 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 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 once 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 (a 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.

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 his 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.

II

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 her sister and bade her good-bye too. One of the strange ladies asked if she might kiss him, and he gravely 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 a 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.

III

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's 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 accepted for the lease the first offer that was made. She stored her furniture, and, at a rent which the parson thought outrageous, took a furnished house for a year, so that she might suffer from no inconvenience till her child was born. But she had never been used to the management of money, and was unable to adapt her expenditure to her altered circumstances. The little she had slipped through her fingers in one way and another, so that now, when all expenses were paid, not much more than two thousand pounds remained to support the boy till he was able to earn his own living. It was impossible to explain all this to Philip and he was sobbing still.

'You'd better go to Emma,' Mr Carey said, feeling that she could console the child better than anyone.

Without a word Philip slipped off his uncle's knee, but Mr Carey stopped him.

'We must go tomorrow, because on Saturday I've got to prepare my sermon, and you must tell Emma to get your things ready today. You can bring all your toys. And if you want anything to remember your father and mother by you

can take one thing for each of them. Everything else is going to be sold.'

The boy slipped out of the room. Mr Carey was unused to work, and he turned to his correspondence with resentment. On one side of the desk was a bundle of bills, and these filled him with irritation. One especially seemed preposterous. Immediately after Mrs Carey's death Emma had ordered from the florist masses of white flowers for the room in which the dead woman lay. It was sheer waste of money. Emma took far too much upon herself. Even if there had been no financial necessity, he would have dismissed her.

But Philip went to her, and hid his face in her bosom, and wept as though his heart would break. And she, feeling that he was almost her own son – she had taken him when he was a month old – consoled him with soft words. She promised that she would come and see him sometimes, and that she would never forget him; and she told him about the country he was going to and about her own home in Devonshire – her father kept a turnpike on the high-road that led to Exeter, and there were pigs in the sty, and there was a cow, and the cow had just had a calf – till Philip forgot his tears and grew excited at the thought of his approaching journey. Presently she put him down, for there was much to be done, and he helped her to lay out his clothes on the bed. She sent him into the nursery to gather up his toys, and in a little while he was playing happily.

But at last he grew tired of being alone and went back to the bedroom, in which Emma was now putting his things into a big tin box; he remembered then that his uncle had said that he might take something to remember his father and mother by. He told Emma and asked her what he should take.

'You'd better go into the drawing-room and see what you fancy.'

'Uncle William's there.'

'Never mind that. They're your own things now.'

Philip went downstairs slowly and found the door open. Mr Carey had left the room. Philip walked slowly round. They had been in the house so short a time that there was little in it that had a particular interest to him. It was a stranger's room, and Philip saw nothing that struck his fancy. But he knew which were his mother's things and which belonged to the landlord, and presently fixed on a little clock that he had once heard his mother say she liked. With this he walked again rather disconsolately upstairs. Outside the door of his mother's bedroom he stopped and listened. Though no one had told him

not to go in, he had a feeling that it would be wrong to do so; he was a little frightened, and his heart beat uncomfortably; but at the same time something impelled him to turn the handle. He turned it very gently, as if to prevent anyone within from hearing, and then slowly pushed the door open. He stood on the threshold for a moment before he had the courage to enter. He was not frightened now, but it seemed strange. He closed the door behind him. The blinds were drawn, and the room, in the cold light of a January afternoon, was dark. On the dressing-table were Mrs Carey's brushes and the hand mirror. In a little tray were hairpins. There was a photograph of himself on the chimney-piece and one of his father. He had often been in the room when his mother was not in it, but now it seemed different. There was something curious in the look of the chairs. The bed was made as though someone were going to sleep in it that night, and in a case on the pillow was a night-dress.

Philip opened a large cupboard filled with dresses and, stepping in, took as many of them as he could in his arms and buried his face in them. They smelt of the scent his mother used. Then he pulled open the drawers, filled with his mother's things, and looked at them: there were lavender bags among the linen; and their scent was fresh and pleasant. The strangeness of the room left it, and it seemed to him that his mother had just gone out for a walk. She would be in presently and would come upstairs to have nursery tea with him. And he seemed to feel her kiss on his lips.

It was not true that he would never see her again. It was not true simply because it was impossible. He climbed up on the bed and put his head on the pillow. He lay there quite still.

IV

PHILIP parted from Emma with tears, but the journey to Blackstable amused him, and, when they arrived, he was resigned and cheerful. Blackstable was sixty miles from London. Giving their luggage to a porter, Mr Carey set out to walk with Philip to the vicarage; it took them little more than five minutes, and, when they reached it, Philip suddenly remembered the gate. It was red and five-barred; it swung both ways on easy hinges; and it was possible, though forbidden, to swing backwards and forwards on it. They walked through the garden to the front door. This was only used by visitors and on