



VINTAGE

DON FERNANDO

W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

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About the Book

Considered by Graham Greene to be Maugham's best work, *Don Fernando* is a paeon to a golden age of enormous creative energy. It discusses the writings of St. Teresa and the paintings of El Greco, and comments with sagacity and wit on such illustrious figures as Cervantes, Velazquez and the creator of Don Juan. This vibrant assessment of a great people at their greatest hour is full of happy surprises, curious facts and stimulating opinions that reflect Maugham's lifelong enchantment with the landscape and people of Spain.

About the Author

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 spent some time at St. Thomas' Hospital with the idea of practising medicine, but the success of his first novel, *Liza of Lambeth*, published in 1897, won him over to letters. *Of Human Bondage*, the first of his masterpieces, came out in 1915, and with the publication in 1919 of *The Moon and Sixpence* his reputation as a novelist was established. At the same time his fame as a successful playwright and short story writer was being consolidated with acclaimed productions of various plays and the publication of *The Trembling of a Leaf*, subtitled *Little Stories of the South Sea Islands*, in 1921, which was followed by seven more collections. His other works include travel books, essays, criticism and the autobiographical *The Summing Up* and *A Writer's Notebook*.

In 1927 Somerset Maugham settled in the South of France and lived there until his death in 1965.

ALSO BY W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

Novels

The Moon and Sixpence
Of Human Bondage
The Narrow Corner
The Razor's Edge
Cakes and Ale
The Merry-Go-Round
The Painted Veil
Catalina
Up at the Villa
Mrs Craddock
The Casuarina Tree
Christmas Holiday
The Magician
Theatre
Liza of Lambeth
Then and Now

Collected Short Stories

Collected Short Stories Vol. 1
Collected Short Stories Vol. 2
Collected Short Stories Vol. 3
Collected Short Stories Vol. 4
Ahenden
Short Stories
Far Eastern Tales
More Far Eastern Tales

Travel Writing

The Gentleman in the Parlour
On a Chinese Screen

Literary Criticism

Ten Novels and their Authors

Points of View

The Vagrant Mood

Autobiography

The Summing Up

A Writer's Notebook

Don Fernando

W. Somerset Maugham

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

Note

I wish to tell the reader that I have taken advantage of a new edition of this book to make certain changes in it. It is not often that a writer comes across a criticism of his work that can be of use to him. When he is lucky enough to do so he is foolish not to profit by it. That is what I have tried to do in this edition. When Mr. Desmond MacCarthy reviewed *The Summing Up* in *The Sunday Times* he remarked, but without acrimony, that I had already said quite a number of things in *Don Fernando* that I had said in the book he was reviewing. I knew it. I had when I wrote it no intention of writing *The Summing Up* and since a subject I happened to be treating in *Don Fernando* seemed to give me a plausible excuse to say various things I very much wanted to say, I said them. As I hoped its name indicated, *The Summing Up* was a summing up of my reflections on most of the matters that in the course of my life had occupied it and so it seemed natural enough to repeat more or less fully what I was well aware I had said in more books than one. But since *The Summing Up* has had a far wider circulation than I could have expected I have thought it wise to omit in this book what in the later one I think I have said more adequately. I was indeed glad to do this, since on re-reading *Don Fernando* after fifteen years, I could not but see that to deal at considerable length with a topic that was not too relevant to my theme was an error in composition. I have learnt enough about the difficult business of writing to know that when you are hunting a fox you have no business to course a hare.

Mr. Raymond Mortimer in a kindly review of *Don Fernando* in *The New Statesman* found one of the chapters tedious. It contained a long passage from a conversation-manual written in the sixteenth century by a certain John Minsheu to teach Englishmen such Spanish phrases as they might find useful on their travels. I inserted it because I thought it threw a curious side-light on the times. John Minsheu described his dialogues as Pleasant and Delightful, but I am prepared to believe that the general reader, who cannot be expected to share my particular interests, found them neither; so I have left the passage out and replaced it by matter which I hope will be more to his taste.

On another point on which Mr. Mortimer animadverted I could do nothing. I stated that these essays on various aspects of Spanish life during the reign of Philip III were composed out of material I had collected in order to write a novel, but which for certain reasons I never wrote. My critic thought this was all moonshine; in fact, if I remember right, he said it was as thin a pretext to account for the writing of a book as he had ever met with. I daresay it was, I could not help it; it was the plain truth. I do not believe any writer would go to the trouble of reading so many books, many of them dull, in a Spanish which the Spaniards of today themselves find none too easy to read, without an ulterior motive. To write about them. The best proof I can give that when I said what I did it was not merely an idle invention to give my book some kind of form and lead me naturally from one topic to another, is that many years later I wrote, certainly not the novel I had purposed, but another dealing with the same period in which I was able to use much of the material I had collected.

I aim to please, and when I came to go over *Don Fernando* again I tried to find some way of getting round the point with which Mr. Mortimer had found fault. For it is no use to tell your readers that so and so is a fact; the fact must be plausible. But since the whole book hung on this thread,

tenuous maybe, but strong enough, I thought, to bear its weight, I soon saw that the only manner in which I could get rid of this useful expedient was to re-write the book from beginning to end, and that I was not prepared to do. If it has no worse defect I can afford to be satisfied.

I am glad to have this opportunity to tender my very grateful thanks to the two distinguished critics I have mentioned for criticism which has enabled me, I hope, to produce a somewhat better book than that which so many years ago I offered to the public.

1

I WAS LIVING in Seville at the time, in the street called Guzman el Bueno, and whenever I went out or came home I passed Don Fernando's tavern. When, my morning's work done, I had gone for a stroll down the gay and crowded Sierpes, I found it very pleasant to drop in for a glass of *manzanilla* on my way back to luncheon; and in the cool of the evening, walking my horse over the dangerous cobbles after a ride in the country, I would often stop, call the boy to hold the horse, and step in. The tavern was no more than a long low room with doors on two sides of it, for it was at the corner of a street; the bar ran down the length of the room and behind it were the barrels of wine from which Don Fernando served you. From the ceiling hung bunches of Spanish onions, strings of sausages, and hams from Granada, which Don Fernando always said were the best in Spain. I think his custom was chiefly among the servants of the neighbourhood. This district of Santa Cruz was then the most elegant in Seville. Tortuous white streets, with large houses, and here and there a church. It was strangely deserted. If you went out in the morning you might see a lady in black, with her maid, going to Mass; sometimes a huckster passed along with his donkey, his wares in great open panniers; or a beggar, stopping at house after house, who raised his voice at each *reja*, the wrought iron gate that led into the patio, and begged for alms with the phrase of immemorial usage. At nightfall the ladies who had been driving in the Paseo in a landau drawn by two horses came home again and the streets resounded with the clatter of the horses' hooves. Then all again grew silent. This was

many years ago. I write of the last years of the nineteenth century.

Don Fernando was small even for a Spaniard, but he was very fat. His round brown face shone with sweat and he had always two days' growth of beard. Never more and never less. I do not know how he managed it. He was incredibly dirty. He had large black shining eyes, with extremely long lashes, and they were at the same time sharp, good-natured and gay. He was a wag and he enjoyed his own dry humour. He spoke in the soft Andalusian Spanish from which the Moorish influence has eliminated the harshness of Castile and it was not till I had learnt the language pretty well that I found him easy to understand. He was an *aficionado* of the bull-ring and it was his boast that the great Guerrita came in now and then to drink a glass of wine with him. He was a bachelor and lived alone with a scrubby, pale-faced boy whom he had got from the orphanage and who did the cooking, washed the glasses and swept the floor. This boy had the most pronounced squint I ever saw.

But Don Fernando did not only sell you as good a glass of *manzanilla* as you could get in Seville; he also dealt in curios. That was why I dropped in to see him so often. You never knew what he might have to show you. I suppose the things came through a confidential servant from the houses in the neighbourhood. Their owners, temporarily embarrassed, were too proud to take them to a shop. They were for the most part small and easily portable, pieces of silver, lace, old fans with sticks of mother-of-pearl decorated with gold, crucifixes, paste ornaments and antique rings of baroque design. Don Fernando seldom acquired a piece of furniture; but when he did, a *bargueño* or a pair of straight-backed chairs, with leather seats and all studded with nails, he would keep it upstairs in the bedroom he shared with the foundling. I had very little money and he knew I could only buy trifles, but he loved to show his purchases and two or three times he took me up into his room. The windows were

closed to keep out the heat by day and the noxious airs by night and it was filthy. It stank. In opposite corners of the room were two small iron beds, unmade at whatever time of day you went in, and the sheets looked as though they had not been washed for months. The floor was strewn with cigarette-ends. Don Fernando's eyes would shine more brightly than ever when he passed his grubby, podgy hand over the wood of a chair that had been polished by the usage of three centuries. He would spit on the dusty gilt surface of a tabernacle and rub the place with his finger to show you with delight the fine quality of the gold. Sometimes, while you stood at the bar, he would fish out from behind it the pieces of a pair of ear-rings, those old heavy Spanish ear-rings in three tiers, and assemble them delicately so that you might admire the beauty of the paste and the elegance of the setting. He had a way of handling these things, sensual and tender, that showed you more than any words he might have spoken how profound a feeling he had for them. When he flicked open an old fan, with the peculiar click that the Spanish woman gives, and fanned himself, an old fan a great lady in her mantilla had flaunted at a bull-fight when Charles III was King of Spain, you could but feel that, ignorant though he was, he had some vague, delightful emotion of the past.

Don Fernando bought cheaply and sold cheaply; and so, after bargaining for days, often for weeks, which I think we both enjoyed, I was able to get from him little by little a number of objects which were not of the smallest use to me, but which I hankered after because their associations appealed to my fancy. So I bought the fans that pretty women, dead a hundred and fifty years ago, had flirted, the ear-rings they wore in their ears, the fantastic rings they wore on their fingers and the crucifixes they hung in their rooms. It was junk and in the passage of time it has all been stolen, lost or given away. Of all I bought from Don Fernando I have now nothing but a book, and that I did not want and

bought against my will. One day as I stepped across the threshold Don Fernando addressed me forthwith.

‘I’ve got something for you,’ he said. ‘I bought it especially for you.’

‘What is it?’

‘A book.’

He opened a drawer in the bar and brought out a little squat volume bound in parchment. My face fell.

‘I don’t want that.’

‘But look at it. It’s an old book. It’s more than three hundred years old.’

He opened it and showed me the title page. There it was all right, the date 1586, with the imprint of Madrid and the publisher’s name: *Por la viuda de Alonso Gomez Impressor de la C.R.M.*

‘It doesn’t cost anything,’ he went on. ‘I’ll give it you for fifty pesetas.’

‘But I don’t want it at any price.’

‘It’s a celebrated book. When it was brought to me I said to myself: Don Guillermo will like that. He’s an educated man.’

‘My eye and Betty Martin.’ (Not many people know the Spanish for that.) ‘Sell it to somebody else. I’m not a book collector. I only buy books to read.’

‘But why shouldn’t you read this? It’s very interesting.’

‘Not to me.’

‘A book three hundred years old? Come, man, don’t say things like that to me. Look, there’s writing on the margins in places and there’s writing on the back page. That shows you it’s old.’

It was true that some reader had written notes here and there in a hand that might very well have been that of the seventeenth century, but I could not decipher a word. I turned a few pages. It was beautifully printed on strong, fine paper, but the type was so close-set that it was difficult to read. The old spelling, the abbreviations I noticed, made it

hard to understand. I shook my head firmly and handed the book back to Don Fernando.

‘You can have it for forty pesetas. I paid thirty-five for it myself.’

‘I wouldn’t have it as a gift.’

He shrugged his shoulders with a sigh and put the book away.

A few days later I happened to pass the tavern on horseback and Don Fernando, who was standing at the doorway sucking a toothpick, called me.

‘Come in a moment; I’ve got something to say to you.’

I dismounted and gave the bridle to the boy. Don Fernando put the book in my hands.

‘I’ll give it you for thirty pesetas. I lose five on it, but I want you to have it.’

‘But I don’t want the book,’ I cried.

‘Twenty-five pesetas.’

‘No.’

‘You needn’t read it. Put it in your library.’

‘I haven’t got a library.’

‘But you ought to have a library. Start your library with this book. It’s a beautiful book.’

‘It isn’t a beautiful book.’

And it wasn’t. Even though I knew I should never read it I might have been tempted if it had been bound in leather with a coat of arms in gold, a handsome folio with wide margins. But it was an ugly little volume, much too thick for its height, and the parchment with which it was bound was crinkled and yellow. I was determined not to have the book. Don Fernando, I do not know why, was determined that I should; and after that I never went into the tavern without his attacking me. He flattered me, he cajoled me, he threw himself on my mercy, he appealed to my sense of justice; he came down in his price to twenty pesetas, to ten, but I stood firm. Then one day he got hold of a wooden statuette of St. Anthony, obviously of the seventeenth century,

beautifully carved and painted, that I immediately set my heart on. We bargained over it for several weeks until at last we arrived somewhere near the price that he was prepared to let it go for and that I was able to pay. The difference between us was only twenty pesetas. I forget the exact sum. I think he was asking a hundred and thirty pesetas and I was offering a hundred and ten.

‘Give me a hundred and thirty for the statue and the book,’ he said, ‘and you’ll never regret it.’

‘Curse the book,’ I cried in exasperation.

I paid for my drink and walked to the door. Don Fernando called me back.

‘Listen,’ he said.

I turned round. He came towards me, an ingratiating smile on his fat, red lips, with the statuette in one hand and the book in the other.

‘I’ll give you the statuette for a hundred and twenty pesetas and I’ll make you a present of the book.’

A hundred and twenty pesetas was the price I had all along made up my mind to give.

‘I’ll pay that,’ I said, ‘but you can keep the book.’

‘It’s a present.’

‘I don’t want a present.’

‘But I want to make you one. It’s a pleasure for me. You can’t refuse a present. Come, man.’

I sighed. I was beaten. I was a trifle ashamed.

‘I’ll give you twenty pesetas for the book.’

‘Even at that it’s a present,’ he said. ‘You could sell it in Madrid for two hundred.’

He wrapped it up in a dirty piece of newspaper; I paid my money, and with the book in my hand and the statuette under my arm, walked home.

IN COURSE OF time I gathered together something of a library and the little squat book that Don Fernando forced upon me found its place in it. Because of its shape and its parchment binding among the paper covers of my foreign books and the multicoloured cloth of the English ones it often caught my eye. It did not irritate me for it reminded me of Don Fernando's tavern, the streets of Seville in summer (the glare mitigated by the awnings stretched across them), and the cool, dry taste of *manzanilla*; but I never thought of reading it. And then one rainy afternoon when I was browsing among my books I happened to notice it and took it from the shelf. I turned over a few pages idly. I thought I would read a paragraph and see what I could make of it. But the paragraph was six pages long. I did not find it so hard to understand as I had expected. The long s's were a bit of a bother and the n's, omitted according to no obvious plan, were indicated by a little squiggle over the preceding letter; v in the middle of a word was replaced by u, and at the beginning sometimes by b. This reproduced the pronunciation of the sixteenth century. But, unfamiliar with this as I was, it was something of a facer when I had to guess that the word spelt *boluer* must be read *volver*. There were many abbreviations and the spelling was archaic. But I found that if I read with attention there was no great difficulty to overcome and the author seemed to me to write with perspicuity. He said what he had to say briefly. I turned back and started at the beginning.

The story I read was strange. Its hero was the youngest son of the thirteen children of Don Beltran Yañez de Oñaz

and his wife Doña Maria Saez de Balda. Don Beltran was the head of an ancient and illustrious house, and his wife was his equal in birth and virtue. They were related to the greatest families in the province of Guipuzcoa. This is one of the pleasantest parts of Spain, a hilly country, with green, fertile valleys through which run bubbling crystalline streams. The cold in winter is tolerable and in summer the air is cool and fresh. Don Beltran's house, still extant, stands in a long, narrow valley closed in by hills in front and by hills behind. But the view, though thus confined, is spacious. The summits of the hills are bare and stony, but trees grow on the sides, and on the lower slopes are patches of pasture, maize and corn. It is a smiling, richly coloured scene. A little river runs through the valley and it may be supposed that it was for the convenience of this that the house was built at that spot. But the times were troublous, and though no longer the fortress that had been destroyed by order of King Henry the Fourth and the Brotherhoods of Guipuzcoa, it could be defended in case of need. It is a square building, the lower part (the remains of the fourteenth century stronghold) of grey untrimmed stone, but the upper part, built a century later in a less warlike manner, is of brick, with the little pepper-pot towers called bartizans decorating the four corners. It is not very large; in England it would seem a country house of but moderate size, and Don Beltran and his wife, with their large family and the number of servants that their station demanded, must have been somewhat crowded. Don Beltran was a man of consequence and his heir, Don Martin, married Doña Magdalena d'Araoz, maid of honour to Queen Isabella the Catholic, who gave her as a wedding-present a painting of the Annunciation. A few days after the bride arrived in her new home she was surprised to find the picture bathed in sweat. The miracle caused great surprise to all the members of the family and Don Pedro Lopez, her husband's brother and a priest, proposed that the picture should be transferred to the

village church for the veneration of the faithful. But Don Martin, unwilling to part with so great a treasure, offered instead to build a chapel in the house, where the miraculous painting might be suitably enshrined.

The youngest son of Don Beltran, the hero of the story I read, was christened Iñigo. When little more than a child he was sent by his father to Court and here entered the service of Don Juan Velazquez de Cuellar, treasurer to the Catholic Kings. Service was an honourable calling. Men of rank thought it no disgrace to place their sons in the households of great noblemen. They waited at table, made the beds, lit the fires, swept the floors and fetched and carried for their masters. Don Juan Velazquez was governor of Arevalo in the province of Avila, one of the cities left by Juan II of Castile to his widow, the mother of Isabella. The arms of Arevalo show a battlemented wall and a plumed knight in full armour on horseback, with his lance at rest. Here the young Iñigo learnt manners, the usages of the world and such accomplishments as became a gentleman. Growing to man's estate, with the example before him of his brothers, who were goodly men, and urged by his own gallant spirit, he applied himself to the exercise of arms. He sought to excel his equals and to achieve a reputation for valour. But his biographer passes over this period briefly. It is only from his own casual remarks made in after life that he is known to have been quick to defend his honour when the occasion arose, to have loved the chase and to have been something of a gambler. He was a young man of a comely person, not very tall, but well-made, with small feet of which he was not a little proud; he admitted in later years that he liked to wear boots that were too tight for him. He had beautiful hair, of a chestnut colour with a reddish glint in it, and his brown eyes were large, moving and wonderfully eloquent. His skin was white. His nose was hooked; it was the most noticeable feature of his face, but it was not so large as to be a disfigurement. He wore with grace the rich clothes of