

Maugham Changes Role in Old Age; Discredits Wife, Daughter

Editor's Note: On Jan. 25 one of the world's best known and most successful popular writers, Somerset Maugham, will be 89 years old. His works are legion, many have become legends. "Of Human Bondage", "The Painted Veil", "The Razor's Edge", "The Constant Wife", "Cakes and Ale", to list just a few. As Maugham approaches his 90th year, here is a closeup of him by a reporter who observed his activities in Europe for many years.



SOMERSET MAUGHAM—Photo of British author taken in 1961. (UPI)

By ROBERT MUSEL
United Press International

All the world's a stage and for nearly 70 years Somerset Maugham observed it from a seat on the aisle extracting from its players what he needed of triumph and tragedy and smiles and sorrows to compose his novels and short stories.

Then, about a year ago, he laid down his pen and with it the role of observer that made him one of the most famous storytellers in the world.

Some of his friends are saddened that he ever left the detachment of his aisle seat to climb on the stage. For on the eve of his 90th year he has become personally involved in the kind of situation that in earlier days might have struck him only as the plot for a work of fiction.

If there is a budding Maugham watching the old man—as once he shrewdly observed others—for a novel still unborn, there is no lack of material. In the past year or so the great writer has been party to a flourish of sensations:

He denied that he is the father of his daughter, Lady Elizabeth Hope, 47, and attempted to disinherit her.

He sued her for the return

Milk Commission Proposal Dropped

Tillamook — (UPI) — The committee charged with drafting a new Oregon milk price stabilization bill has decided to drop plans for a milk commission and advisory board.

That means the milk marketing program will continue to be based in the State Department of Agriculture, according to George Milne, Tillamook dairyman and chairman of the committee.

The proposed bill will be submitted to the legislature by the dairy industry.

Milne said the commission and advisory board were dropped to remove any possible objections that the program would be controlled by producers.

The bill will provide for market pools in several areas in the state, governed by voluntary contractual agreements, Milne said. If the producers reject the pool provision, the State Department of Agriculture would have authority to draw up a marketing program.

Milne said producers favor the voluntary plan because it could be extended to take in Southwest Washington dairymen. The agriculture department would have no authority in that region.

Greek Prayerbook Given University

Houston — (UPI) — A handwritten prayerbook translated from Greek by a powerful political figure in Colonial Virginia was given to the University of Texas after it turned up in a Houston home.

The book was translated from Greek by Philip Ludwell II, who once persuaded the colonial governor of Virginia to appoint George Washington as commander of the militia.

of various gifts totalling more than \$1,000,000.

He adopted his secretary, Alan Searle, 58, as his son and heir.

He permitted publication of part of an autobiography—originally intended to be published only after his death—in which he frankly dissected the character of his late wife, Syrie.

Trustees for Lady Elizabeth—daughter of Syrie—filed suit blocking the transfer to New York of \$29,581 pounds sterling (\$842,826) which Maugham obtained by the auction last April of nine works from his celebrated collection of modern art.

Today, as every day, Maugham will wander after breakfast in the beautiful gardens of his Moorish-style villa, "La Mauresque" at Cap Ferrat near Monte Carlo, listening to the song of hundreds of exotic cage birds, tending the prize roses which are his special pride.

Is Broken Man
Searle, who looks far younger than his years, met Maugham in 1929 when he was asked to fill in at a dinner party for someone who had cancelled out at the last moment. He was seated, by chance next to the guest of honor who was Maugham.

"Soon after that evening," Searle said, "we started out on a journey together and we have been on that journey ever since."

They were drawn together, he said, by their mutual respect for the poor. Searle had worked with the Salvation Army and in prisons as a visitor. Before he took up writing as a career Maugham was an obstetrician and delivered more than 60 babies, many of them free cases. Despite the difference in age they were perfect companions as I noted myself when I last visited Maugham at "La Mauresque."

I arrived just after the 9 a.m. ritual of the tour of the gardens. Maugham was relaxing in the large, elegant drawing room of the three-story mansion. Searle was still in the gardens among the combed cypresses, the avocados imported from California and a botanical freak, a tree that produces both oranges and lemons.

Searle ran the house and made certain of the old man's comfort so that Maugham would not have anything on his mind but his writing if he should want to do any in his work room on an upper story. Maugham's last writing incidentally was painful. He had to wear a surgical glove because of persistent writer's cramp.

Prefers Searle
They spent as much time as possible together—all meals, walks in the garden, conversation after dinner and listening to records before going to sleep.

But despite their long friendship it was a distinct surprise when it was revealed after Christmas that Maugham had adopted Searle as his son in the court at Nice last April. This disclosure was a by-product of the suit Maugham brought against Lady Elizabeth asking for the return of all gifts made to her.

Maugham, in his declaration to the court, said of Lady Elizabeth, who is the wife of a former minister of works in the conservative government: "I always considered her as my daughter but legally she is the daughter of Henry Wellcome. She was born in 1915. Wellcome never denied paternity."

used to be on very affectionate terms. But recent newspaper articles by Mr. Maugham about my wife's mother, Syrie, caused my wife great distress. Since then my wife has not written to her father. She has kept a dignified and distressed silence."

He said he did not think the lawsuit over the paintings entirely explained "this sudden break between my wife and her father."

The autobiographical extracts on Syrie appeared in "Show" magazine in the United States which later received a letter of bitter protest from Oliver Messel, the distinguished stage designer and uncle of Lord Snowdon.

Condemns Wife
"It seems impossible to understand," Messel wrote "what Somerset Maugham hopes to achieve by writing in such a tasteless way about his dead wife."

"Far from being, as Maugham smugly attempts to portray her, a pleasure-seeking wanton without resources Syrie was one of the most resourceful, intuitively brilliant women that I have been fortunate enough to meet . . . the only mistake Syrie seems to have made was to have loved a man incapable of appreciating her."

"Cassandra", the widely quoted columnist of the London Daily Mirror, said he did not know the rights or wrongs of Maugham's court case against Lady Elizabeth.

"But it seems a sad and surly course for a famous man to embark upon at the age of eighty-eight. This action against his daughter follows a recent bitter and wounding attack that Maugham made on his wife, Syrie Maugham, and his subsequent curious action in adopting a man aged fifty."

Seeks Property
"If this be the wisdom of age, give me the folly of youth."

If Maugham recovers any property from Lady Elizabeth—and Searle says the Nice suite is mainly to get back ownership of "La Mauresque"—it will eventually go into a charity he set up in his will to help writers who are in trouble or sick or old. Searle estimates his own inheritance from the estate at 300,000 sterling (\$1,400,000) but it is only a life interest and after his death it goes to charity.

"Lady John Hope inherits the bulk of Mr. Maugham's fortune whatever happens," he said. "That is irrevocable."

Health Good
Outside of his personal troubles Maugham is in good health for his great age. He says he does not come from a particularly long-lived family yet his brother, Lord Maugham, lived to 92. His appetite is good and his cook, Irene, prepares dishes from her native Italian cuisine as well as French and English food. He long ago cultivated the habit of after-lunch siesta which his good friend Sir Winston Churchill, 88, also practices.

When I asked him about his long life some years ago Maugham used a phrase worth repeating as he reaches his 89th birthday. Looking down at his slight figure, he said:

"If you are small, death may quite likely overlook you."

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