

ORIENTATIONS

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Orientalisms by William Somerset Maugham

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WILLIAM SOMERSET MAUGHAM

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE PUNCTILIOUSNESS OF DON SEBASTIAN	3
A BAD EXAMPLE	37
DE AMICITIA	97
FAITH	133
THE CHOICE OF AMYNTAS	165
DAISY	219

C'est surtout, par les nouvelles d'un jeune écrivain qu'on peut se rendre compte du tour de son esprit. Il y cherche la voie qui lui est propre dans une série d'essais de genre et de style différents, qui sont comme des orientations, pour trouver son moi littéraire.

*THE PUNCTILIOUSNESS OF DON
SEBASTIAN*

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Orientations

THE PUNCTILIOUSNESS OF DON SEBASTIAN

I

XIORMONEZ is the most inaccessible place in Spain. Only one train arrives there in the course of the day, and that arrives at two o'clock in the morning; only one train leaves it, and that starts an hour before sunrise. No one has ever been able to discover what happens to the railway officials during the intermediate one-and-twenty hours. A German painter I met there, who had come by the only train, and had been endeavouring for a fortnight to get up in time to go away, told me that he had frequently gone to the station in order to clear up the mystery, but had never been

able to do so; yet, from his inquiries, he was inclined to suspect—that was as far as he would commit himself, being a cautious man—that they spent the time in eating garlic and smoking execrable cigarettes. The guide-books tell you that Xiormonez possesses the eyebrows of Joseph of Arimathea, a cathedral of the greatest quaintness, and battlements untouched since their erection in the fourteenth century. And they strongly advise you to visit it, but recommend you before doing so to add Keating's insect powder to your other toilet necessaries.

I was travelling to Madrid in an express train which had been rushing along at the pace of sixteen miles an hour, when suddenly it stopped. I leant out of the window, asking where we were.

'Xiormonez!' answered the guard.

'I thought we did not stop at Xiormonez.'

'We do not stop at Xiormonez,' he replied impassively.

'But we are stopping now!'

'That may be; but we are going on again.'

I had already learnt that it was folly to argue with a Spanish guard, and, drawing

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