

CHAPTER IV

HALF-CASTES

The half-castes in Maugham's works were a special group of people whose fathers were Westerners and whose mothers were native women or women with white blood in their veins. If the mothers were Asian, these half-castes were sometimes called Eurasians.

The half-caste children were ugly and sickly-looking. The ones from nearby islands were sent to New Zealand to schools which admitted half-caste children. Because of their native blood, they could not mix with white children. They played among themselves or with native children; therefore, they generally spoke the native language. Most white fathers did not love their half-caste children because they were more like native, than white, children. Lowson was very disappointed to see that his sons were not white but dark babies with black hair and black eyes. He was fond of them when they were children but when they grew up he felt indifferent to them because they were like natives and he had to talk to them in Samoan.

Guy also felt indifferent to his half-caste children for the same reasons. When he wanted to marry a white lady, he just sent the mother and children away. And he even felt upset to see them around the house for fear that Doris

would know that they were his children.

The white fathers generally gave the half-caste children enough money for a decent education so that they could earn their living by working as clerks in a Government office. The half-castes accepted small pay because the native blood in their veins prevented them from getting good jobs. They became clerks, sailors, traders or assistants to the planters.

The white men usually spoke of the half-caste with contempt because it was believed that the half-caste inherited bad qualities from both the white father and the native mother. To the white men the half-caste was unreliable, incapable, negligent, impudent, conceited, and unsatisfied. Half-castes could never rise in their positions because of these prejudices against them. The men could never marry white women. They married half-caste or native women. Only beautiful half-caste women like Daisy and Etzel sometimes married white men. However, these half-caste women were not happy because the white ladies would not make friends with them and the half-caste women's white husbands resented mixing with their wives' half-caste friends or native relatives. Mackintosh shuddered when he thought that he would have a half-caste father-in-law and a native mother-in-law if he married Teresa, Jervis's daughter.

Daisy and Ethel both had unhappy marriages although they were very different. Daisy was educated as an English lady. Yet, she was neither accepted in the white man's society nor, because of her own vanity, could she get along with the natives. Disappointed by both her first lover and her mother, she became a prostitute. When she finally married Harry, she was tormented by the fear that her husband would learn about her sinful past. She wanted to have a happy life, but she never had a chance.

Ethel was not so well-educated as Daisy and therefore was happier because she could mix with her native friends and relatives. Although she could not get along with the white ladies, it made no difference to her. Since she had a stronger character than her husband, she did what she pleased. She would not go to live in a separate house with Lawson because she preferred to live like a native. It drove Lawson mad to have a crowd of natives in the house all the time.

It was thought that if a white man kept a half-caste woman instead of marrying her he would be happier and it would be easier for him to rise in his job. The woman would have no power over him because he could do what he pleased with her. That was why Lawson said, "I suppose I ought not to have married Ethel. If I'd kept her it would be all right."¹³⁹ And that was the reason why Knox thought

that Freddy Baker was a fool to have married a half-caste because if Baker had kept her, he would not have had to endure being transferred from one small outpost to another.

But some half-castes like Tiaré Johansen in The Moon and Simponce had a happy life. She married twice but never had conflicts with either of her husbands concerning other white men. This was probably because neither of her husbands ever held a high position.

Although her first husband beat her, she was fond of him because she, like the average native woman and many other half-caste women, adored a manly man. She did not mind when her husband beat her. On the other hand, she felt contempt for her second, gentlemanly husband and in the end divorced him. Tiaré's contempt was similar to Ethel's. Although Ethel often fought with Lawson, she knew that Lawson was weak. Ethel could not divorce Lawson probably because she did not have private means as Tiaré did.

Eva Jackson was also a happy half-caste girl because her father loved her. She was not so well educated as Daisy but was better educated than Ethel, for Arnold Jackson taught her. Therefore, she was not so conceited as Daisy and could live happily with her native relatives. She also had a prospect of having a happy marriage, for Edward was not

so ambitious and vain as other white men. Moreover, he loved living like a native and therefore he would not resent being treated as an equal by his native relatives and friends.

The prejudices against half-castes made it impossible for them to be given important work to do. They had no chance whatever to be like white men. This was the reason why Izzert never told anybody that he was a half-caste. He lived in fear that people would find out the truth and would treat him like other half-castes. He tried to be like an average white man. He played games well and he was friendly, sociable and cheerful. If it had been known that he was a half-caste, he would have had no chance to rise in his job, to marry a white woman or to mix with other white men.

Maughan pointed out from the life of suffering of half-castes that they were victims of circumstances. They should have been given an opportunity to prove themselves. They would have been like white men if they had been treated like them. Since they were human beings, they naturally had some faults. It was unfair for the white men to jump to the conclusion that all the half-castes were unreliable because of the failure of some of them.