



In the Land of Pain (Vintage Classics)

By Alphonse Daudet

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As Julian Barnes writes in the introduction to his superb translation of Alphonse Daudet's *La Douleur*, the mostly forgotten writer nowadays “ate at the top literary table” during his lifetime (1840–1897). Henry James described him as “the happiest novelist” and “the most charming story-teller” of his day. Yet if Daudet dined in the highest company, he was also “a member of a less enviable nineteenth-century French club: that of literary syphilitics.” **In the Land of Pain**—notes toward a book never written—is his timelessly resonant response to the disease.

In quick, sharp, unflinching strokes of his pen, Daudet wrote about his symptoms (“This is me: the one-man-band of pain”) and his treatments (“Mor-phine nights . . . thick black waves, sleepless on the surface of life, the void beneath”); about his fears and reflections (“Pain, you must be everything for me. Let me find in you all those foreign lands you will not let me visit. Be my philosophy, be my science”); his impressions of the patients, himself included, and their strange life at curative baths and spas (“Russians, both men and women, go into the baths naked . . . Alarm among the Southerners”); and about the “clever way in which death cuts us down, but makes it look like just a thinning-out.”

Given Barnes's crystalline translation, these notes comprise a record—at once shattering and lighthearted, haunting and beguiling—of both the banal and the transformative experience of physical suffering, and a testament to the complex resiliency of the human spirit.

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In the Land of Pain (Vintage Classics) By Alphonse Daudet Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1141953 in eBooks
- Published on: 2016-03-22
- Released on: 2016-03-22
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

A popular writer in his time and admired by Charles Dickens and Henry James, French novelist, playwright and journalist Alphonse Daudet (1840-1897) has been largely forgotten today. According to novelist and essayist Barnes (*Something to Declare*, etc.), Daudet's work, although considered charming and topical in its heyday, did not have the depth and relevance to transcend its age—with one exception, this small volume, translated into English now for the first time. Basically a loose journal of ideas, metaphors and observations, the book offers a devastating emotional and spiritual portrait of a man in profound physical pain in the tertiary stage of syphilis. Daudet continued to write and publish during his illness, though he experienced bouts of rheumatism and severe fatigue, which progressed on to debilitating "locomotor ataxia (the inability to control one's movements), and finally, paralysis." Daudet's descriptions of his physical ailment are palpably horrifying, and the feelings of isolation and inadequacy that result give readers a new understanding of the psychology of illness. Of the "sheer torture" of his pain, Daudet ultimately concludes that there are no words, "only howls." Words, he says, "only come when everything is over.... They refer only to memory, and are either powerless or untruthful." However inadequate the author may believe his words to have been, the indomitable spirit of life that is conveyed on every one of these pages is Daudet's ultimate triumph. 4 illus. Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From [The New Yorker](#)

Syphilis may lack something of the romantic aura surrounding tuberculosis in literary history, but it was the illness of choice for the French nineteenth century: Flaubert, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Maupassant all suffered from it. Daudet, best known for his light, charming stories of southern France (Barnes judges him a tie for fourth-most important syphilitic), died of it, in 1897. These are his notes from underground. They include a narrative of his treatments (in which the author is hung in the air by the jaw and injected with a solution extracted from guinea pigs), ruminations on fear and fraud, and sharp observations of the healthy. But much of the book—and the book's force—lies in the patient's flailing search for a language to match his suffering. "Tonight, pain in the form of an impish little bird hopping hither and thither," he writes. "The only part of me that's alive is my pain."

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From [Booklist](#)

Acclaimed novelist Barnes describes French writer Daudet (1840-97) as having been "substantially forgotten," but in his day, Daudet counted among his circle Flaubert, Dickens, James, Zola, Turgenev, and the Goncourt brothers, and was widely admired as a "sunny humorist and clear stylist." He was also one of the "literary syphilitics," stricken with a form called *tabes dorsalis*, a horrifically painful affliction that impaired motion and eventually brought on paralysis. A generous and philosophical man, Daudet faced his ever-increasing pain and debility with remarkable courage and kindness to others. Grateful to remain sound of mind, he found some comfort in writing about his struggle, making the keenly observant and vital notes that comprise this remarkable, impressionistic, and life-affirming memoir. Daudet's gifts for vivid description, sharp humor, penetrating reflection, and lithe storytelling were irrepressible, and his account of his derailed life from "the day Pain entered" onward, a text rediscovered and superbly translated by Barnes, is deeply affecting testimony to the radiance of the soul even as the body turns to "stone which feels pain."

Donna Seaman

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Amy Dixon:

Book is usually written, printed, or outlined for everything. You can recognize everything you want by a reserve. Book has a different type. We all know that that book is important matter to bring us around the world. Adjacent to that you can your reading proficiency was fluently. A guide In the Land of Pain (Vintage Classics) will make you to be smarter. You can feel much more confidence if you can know about every thing. But some of you think that will open or reading the book make you bored. It is far from make you fun. Why they are often thought like that? Have you in search of best book or suited book with you?

Charles Carter:

Reading a e-book tends to be new life style in this particular era globalization. With reading through you can get a lot of information that can give you benefit in your life. Along with book everyone in this world may share their idea. Publications can also inspire a lot of people. A great deal of author can inspire all their reader with their story as well as their experience. Not only the story that share in the books. But also they write about the knowledge about something that you need illustration. How to get the good score toefl, or how to teach your sons or daughters, there are many kinds of book which exist now. The authors these days always try to improve their ability in writing, they also doing some exploration before they write to the book. One of them is this In the Land of Pain (Vintage Classics).

Victor Green:

Reading can called imagination hangout, why? Because when you are reading a book mainly book entitled In the Land of Pain (Vintage Classics) the mind will drift away trough every dimension, wandering in every aspect that maybe unknown for but surely will end up your mind friends. Imaging each and every word written in a publication then become one web form conclusion and explanation that maybe you never get prior to. The In the Land of Pain (Vintage Classics) giving you yet another experience more than blown away the mind but also giving you useful details for your better life within this era. So now let us show you the relaxing pattern at this point is your body and mind will be pleased when you are finished looking at it, like winning a game. Do you want to try this extraordinary wasting spare time activity?

Luann Bowen:

Is it an individual who having spare time subsequently spend it whole day by watching television programs or just lying down on the bed? Do you need something new? This In the Land of Pain (Vintage Classics) can be the answer, oh how comes? A fresh book you know. You are consequently out of date, spending your extra time by reading in this brand-new era is common not a nerd activity. So what these guides have than the others?

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