

ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY
AIRMAN, POET, PHILOSOPHER

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ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY

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Count Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900-1944) is one of the rare twentieth century writers who has written of the greatness of man, rather than of his weakness. In addition to literary fame based on the international popularity of Night Flight, The Little Prince, and Wind, Sand and Stars, Saint-Exupéry was noted for his daring pioneering during early aviation history, and for his valiant flying record with the French and American forces during World War II.

Saint-Exupéry, the youngest of five children of a French aristocratic family dating from the thirteenth century, spent his early childhood in a beautiful château in the south of France. These early years were wonderfully happy years despite the death of his father in 1904, and of his brother in 1917. His education was received from Jesuits and Marists in France and Switzerland. Because he was a daydreamer and erratic in his behavior, his school grades were poor. However, he was an avid reader in literature, science, and philosophy, and he possessed a brilliant mind. During his adolescence, he lost his religious faith and the rest of his life was devoted to a constant search for the true meaning of God.

At the close of World War I, Saint-Exupéry received

his flight training and joined Latécoère Airlines which operated between France and Africa. For eighteen months he was in charge of Cap Juby, a desert fueling stop on the coast of Africa. It was here that he started his literary career with the writing of his first novel, Courrier Sud.

After his African assignment, Saint-Exupéry was named Director of the Buenos Aires branch of Aéropostale. Later, this airline became a part of what is today known as Air France. True adventures of hazardous flying over ocean and mountains during his stay in South America are excitingly related in Wind, Sand and Stars and Night Flight. Literary awards and fame followed the publication of these books.

His marriage to a young South American widow, Consuelo Suncin, took place in 1930. The fiery temperament of the young wife combined with the husband's instability created a turbulent marriage, but, nonetheless, a marriage of great love.

The Little Prince was written in the United States immediately prior to World War II. This short novel is a delightful fantasy blending mysticism and philosophical perception with childlike simplicity.

The Little Prince, as well as Night Flight, Wind, Sand and Stars, and The Wisdom of the Sands, expresses the recurrent themes of Saint-Exupéry's philosophy. This philosophy stresses the need for love among all men, the importance of responsibility in attaining happiness, the value of a goal greater than the self, and the essential dignity of mankind and of each individual. This philosophy, requiring that each

men strive for greatness in the acceptance of responsibility, is one which demands mastery over the self. Saint-Exupéry was well aware of his own limitations against which he constantly struggled in the knowledge that men must not succumb to his weaknesses.

During World War II, Saint-Exupéry, attached to Air Reconnaissance Group 2/33, flew several missions. On July 31, 1944, during a reconnaissance flight over German occupied France, his plane vanished. Saint-Exupéry was reported missing in action.

Today, there is renewed interest in the literary output of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. A Broadway musical production of The Little Prince is under consideration, and a new edition of fragments has recently been published.