



Beau Geste

P.C. Wren

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One stolen sapphire and one, two, three thieves!

Beau, Digby and John Geste were present when Lady Brandon showed her dinner guests the "Blue Water". Suddenly the lights went out and the fabulous gem vanished. Shortly after, the Gestes disappeared, too.

Beau wrote his confession first. Next Digby. Then John. All three claimed to be the thief. Each fled to the same famous hiding place - the French Foreign Legion.

But who had the sapphire? Beau? Digby? Or John? Their villainous commanding officer wanted the answer - and he wanted it bad enough to kill!

The dramatic story of the French Foreign Legion, where men hid from the law or a woman - but never from death!

Beau Geste Details

Date : Published 1961 by Pocket Books, Inc. (PermaBook Edition) (first published 1924)

ISBN :

Author : P.C. Wren

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Genre : Fiction, Classics, Adventure, Historical, Historical Fiction, Mystery, Cultural, Africa

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From Reader Review Beau Geste for online ebook

C Mac says

hello

OH where
is Max Perkins when you need him

wordy slog
adventure story

far too much dead space
nothing nothing is happening

does not age well

see the Gary Cooper movie
its much better than the book

yours truly
mac

Squire says

Cleverly-structured and engrossing adventure/mystery story with an intriguing set up for the main story of three brothers joining the French Foreign Legion. Terrific British flair in speech and action carry this story through it's occasional lulls. Wren also uses a lot of French terms and phrases in the book to give an appropriately exotic flavor. While there are no footnotes in the text I read, context clues and being able to "see" the spelling of the words helped in deriving appropriate meanings for them and didn't cause me any undue delay in reading (I would have hated to listen to the book). I was enthralled from beginning to end.

Definitely one I would consider reading again at some point (though there are two sequels to read before that happens).

K. says

Reread Dec 2012, loved again.

What a fabulous book!! I am SO enjoying building up my reactionary library (see article pasted in below).

Beau Geste was an ultimate boy/man book (to be much enjoyed by women who love real men too:). While I have to admit that there wasn't, perhaps, anything mind-blowingly profound in this book (except maybe that it's so very different from the messages found in most more modern lit), there were a few things I thought made this book one I want the little men I'm raising to learn and emulate.

1. Honesty. Every one of the heroes in this book was a man of strict honesty. His word was bond.
2. A Man's Role as the Protector of Women. Oh boy, that was SO anti-feminist of me. Oh well. I would also spoil the book if I spilled why this was such an important part of the story. Nevertheless, this role isn't acted out in a self-righteous, nasty sort of way, but as a device used to truly protect a much loved and respected woman's honor in her misfortune.
3. Manhood. Like I stated in the beginning--these guys were MEN! Men who didn't go seeking for trouble or fame or honor but who found it and earned it by living up to high standards of conduct and Christian moral ideals.
4. Brotherhood & friendship between men. This is a story of 3 brothers and another set of 2 friends who are as good as brothers. I don't believe I have EVER read a story in which brothers or male friends are ever true, loyal, kind, and non-competitive. It seems we always get some story of jealousy, competition, deception etc. This was a story of three brothers who loved and honored each other so much that they couldn't stand to see one of them blamed for an act they knew none of them did, so they all tried to shift the blame on to themselves instead.

I totally loved this book. Can't wait to get my boy to read it, he'll love it too.

Only problem was that my copy had quite a lot of French and no footnotes. Doggone it, I don't know French!

IT WAS AWESOME!! I enjoyed every single second. I love reading a totally thrilling adventure story where there is not ONE SINGLE INSTANCE of "chagrin" or the feeling that one should probably be ashamed for reading it. Again, that's why I am totally loving my budding "Reactionary Library."

In my review to "Prester John" I put a link to an article entitled "Adventure Books for Boys." That article references another article that explains that tradition further--I have pasted it below for your enjoyment.

The Book of Virtues: A Treasury of Great Moral Stories. - book reviews by Digby Anderson

The Book of Virtues: A Treasury of Great Moral Stories, edited, with commentary by William J. Bennett (Simon & Schuster, 873 pp., \$27.50)

SOME ten years ago I noticed a copy of Baroness Orczy's *Scarlet Pimpernel* in a second-hand bookshop. As I picked it up and leafed through it, I remembered just how much I had enjoyed it at the age of ten. What I had enjoyed was not just the adventure but adventure infused with morality. I bought it and read it again expecting to find it nonsense. It is not nonsense. In fact it is all the better today since its genre is so rare. Slowly the names started coming back: not just Baroness Orczy but Rider Haggard, Anthony Hope, Rafael Sabatini, G.A. Henty, Harrison Ainsworth, Conan Doyle, C.S. Forester, John Buchan, P. C. Wren, Percy Westerman, and a dozen others. What had happened to all those books? I suppose I must have thrown them away. Some I never owned but borrowed from libraries or other boys--"You can have my Henty, if you lend me your Buchan."

Anyway, I started to look for replacement copies. And the first point of this personal note is that re-collecting them was hard. There are surprisingly few about. Of course, you can find them if you are prepared to visit countless bookshops and sift through the filth and inanity that fill them--and the unpleasant people one finds in bookshops these days. Of course, you can find them if you are content to wait. But you are not content to wait. Read *Greenmantle* or *She* and it's so good you want more now, and not just the well-known ones such as *Prester John* and *King Solomon's Mines*, but the many more less well known: *The Courts of the Morning* and *The Prince of the Captivity*, *Nada the Lily* and *Moon of Israel*. Ten years later I have them--most of

them in a tall Victorian bookcase, eight shelves entirely filled with reactionary novels.

Suppose you wanted to do something similar. Suppose you wanted to collect the books that gave you so much pleasure as a child and did so much for your moral formation--not perhaps quite my stories but shorter stories suitable for younger children. Suppose you wanted to do this not for yourself but for your own children. You would face a long and a daunting task to find them. Or you would have done till now. For William Bennett has done all your work for you. In one volume he has collected a wealth of short moral tales and poems suitable for young children. There are 873 pages of them.

They are ordered under the virtues they illustrate and encourage: self-discipline, compassion, responsibility, friendship, work, courage, perseverance, honesty, loyalty, and faith. Each section starts with stories suitable for adults to read to young children or for the young children to read for themselves, then goes on to ones suitable for older children. For instance, "Responsibility" starts with Olive Wadsworth's *Mother Toad*, the *Three Little Kittens*, and *Orphan Annie*, proceeds through *St. George and the dragon* and *Alfred's burnt cakes*, through *Damocles* and "*The Charge of the Light Brigade*," and goes on to *Thucydides*, *Plato*, and *Jefferson*.

Mr. Bennett has created a treasury no conservative parent would want to be without. For conservative parents know the role such stories can play in moral education. The early building of character depends heavily on examples, both in this world and in literature. Children--and adults to some degree--emulate people, net ideas. Modern societies are going through a period of grave social disorder shown in crime, marriage collapse, gender confrontation, community disintegration, and drug abuse. The way back is through the rediscovery of the good, of the virtues. Virtues are taught by good laws, by stern punishments, and by moral tales. What Mr. Bennett has provided, then, is not just a source of enjoyment and literary education, but a contribution to moral literacy and a path back to social order for future generations.

One can always find fault with particular collections. I would have liked sections on courtesy, hope, and service, for instance. The token non-Christian readings are a mistake. This is overwhelmingly a Christian book, and Mr. Bennett should not be afraid to say so. But there are two more general drawbacks--both minor. I was struck by how little it resembles my own reactionary library. This is largely because mine are mostly full-length novels and many are English. But there are few tales in the Bennett collection that have the spirit found in *Buchan*, *Hope*, and the others in the Victorian bookcase. The blood-and-morality novels have a moral energy some of his tales lack. I was going to say his are more suitable for little girls than little boys but it is not quite that. There is a slight tendency to preciousness in the new collection. Here's a revealing test. Both sorts of books would infuriate progressive persons, but while Mr. Bennett's would make them retch, the *Hopes* and *Haggards* would make them explode.

That is related to the other tendency. The longer stories are edited to bring out their moral parts, the punch line. Each story is preceded by a little introduction which explains its moral point. This plus the collection of so much morality in one volume does make for a sort of earnestness. I can't see how this could be got round but it is unfortunate, because morality should not be earnest. It can be carried, if not lightly, apparently lightly. That is why *Sir Richard Hannay*, *Sir Percy Blakeney*, *Allan Quatermain*, and the other swashbucklers make such good moral heroes: they are good and attractive. And if morality mixed with adventure makes for easier reading, so does morality mixed with humor. Two poems about truth show this well. One shows the rewards of honesty, the other, the fate of liars. But the difference is that the first is flat and earnest, the second, teasing and amusing. The little boy with a curly head and pleasant eye who never never told a lie and therefore had lots of friends (p. 601) is a rather repulsive prig. *Belloc* does much better with *Matilda* (pp. 607-8). She, of course, told dreadful lies and called the fire brigade when there wasn't a fire, and so when there was one the fire brigade wouldn't come. "For every time she shouted 'Fire!'/They only answered 'Little liar!'/And therefore when her aunt returned, /Matilda and her house were burned."

It is very important that those who exhibit the virtues in real life and in literature do not exhibit the grim

earnestness of their progressive and politically correct opponents. One of the lesser-known titles of Christ was "the attractive one" or "He who attracts." The best stories in this excellent collection are those with characters who are good and fun, good and attractive.

Mr. Anderson is the editor of *The Loss of Virtue: Moral Confusion and Social Disorder in Britain and America* (National Review Books).

There is more to this article, a sequel if you will, but it was too long to fit in here. I'll paste it under my review of "The Thirty-Nine Steps" by John Buchan

Note to self:

Joel read this just after I did. He LOVED it! I could hardly get his nose out of it.

Wade Grassman says

Let me say that I am a huge fan of old adventure movies, one of my favourites has been *Beau Geste* ('39 with Gary Cooper, Robert Preston and Ray Milland). The source book has been on the "Get to read list" for a very long time, thanks to my wife's thoughtful gift of a Nook last Christmas, I've been slowly popping off some of the classics on that list.

If you have a Nook or a Kindle, I would advise you don't get the lowest price version of this classic. The text was so filled with typos it was difficult to determine whether I was reading French (which I neither speak nor read) or some horrendous spelling typo errors. Frankly, it the copy was so bad that it really diminished my enjoyment of the story.

On its own the story is terrific! It was all that I could ask for. Being as familiar with the story as I am, the novel still held surprises for me.

Helena Jole says

Classic British tale of mystery and run-away-and-join-the-Foreign-Legion adventure. It was a good read, though it did drag in places, and I absolutely hated the ending. Or not the ending so much, but the bit right before the ending.

I first encountered this book at my grandmother's house when I was maybe 10 or so. One bedroom had a big deep closet with a bookshelf full of old Superman, Lone Ranger, and Uncle Scrooge comic books. We used to spend hours in that closet every time we visited. There was also a copy of *Beau Geste*--plain hardcover, unassuming--I don't know why I even picked it up in the first place. We found the book baffling. (I knew how to pronounce "Beau" by that time, but "Geste" was a mystery.) I remember flipping through the first chapter and not being able to make heads or tails of it, but we were amused by the British spelling of "pyjamas" and the line, "Then bid him not die, on pain of death, till I have questioned him!"

That line stuck with me over the years. I recently thought of the book and decided to download it for my

kindle. After years of disparaging the book for being "boring" (based on the impenetrable first pages) I figured I should give it a fair shake.

The plot centers around two mysteries: first, how did a French fort in the middle of the desert come to be manned by dead men, and second, who stole the "Blue Water" sapphire? It is a little dense at first, and the first section is quite different from the rest of the book. I found Major de Beaujolais's language rather difficult in places. But that part isn't very long, and then you get into the story of the three Geste boys and the action picks up. The style is quite readable and parts of it are even funny.

Michael, with raised hand, solemnly uttered the beautiful words, "*Ashes to ashes and dust to dust, if God won't have you the devil must,*" and, applying a match to the pyre, shoved the long-ship (late French battleship) well out into the middle of the lily-pond.

and

"Move--and I'll kill you," I hissed dramatically, feeling like a cinema star and an ass.

As the story unfolded I was pretty sure how things were going to turn out, but parts of it were still a revelation. And then there was that whole "wandering around in the desert" bit which made me want to throw the book against the wall (which you can't really do, with a kindle).

The book is a bit dated, and has some less-than-complimentary descriptions of certain ethnic groups. And the Americans' dialect is embarrassingly ridiculous. But it's a good strong story. "Doing the right thing" is the strongest theme in the book, and I can fully understand how a copy ended up on a shelf with the comic books, in a house with three boys.

I got the ebook from mobileread.com. I was happy with it except for the fact that all the dashes come out as hyphens, which is confusing and annoying, but fortunately it's not dash-heavy so it didn't hamper my enjoyment excessively. There's also one point where Isobel's name is misspelled in Digby's letter, and I kept wondering if that was supposed to be a clue. (It's not.)

I had to pause in the middle of this book to read *The Goose Girl* for book club, but I was interested enough to come back to it when I was done. I don't know that I would ever go back and read it again but I might recommend it to someone who was interested in historical adventure stories. And I might check out one of the movies some day.

Cphe says

A stirring historical mystery, a tale filled with adventure. The story of three brothers who for reasons of their own run away to join the French Foreign Legion. This is a rollicking good tale of loyalty, honour, love and mateship. Reminded me of one of those "boy's own" adventure tales. A few lulls in the pacing and delivery but a wonderful premise. Far exceeded my expectations.

I regret that it's taken me so long to get around to reading this (IMO) unappreciated classic.

Lady ♥ Belleza says

When I was a girl, boys would talk about running away to join the Foreign Legion. I have a feeling this book, or maybe the movies made based on it are where they got this idea.

The dramatic story of the French Foreign Legion, where men hid from the law or a woman - but never from death!

Call me naive, but I had my doubts about if there really was a French Foreign Legion. Not only was I wrong about it existing, it still exists, they even have a website:

Whatever your origins, nationality or religion might be, whatever qualifications you may or may not have, whatever your social or professional status might be, whether you are married or single, the French Foreign Legion offers you a chance to start a new life...
<http://www.legion-recrute.com/en/>

This book is much more than an adventure story, it has two mysteries, that end up being related. The first is "STRANGE EVENTS AT ZINDERNEUG" where, after receiving a distress call the French Legionnaires arrive find it manned by dead men. One of the men has a note on him saying he stole the "Blue Water", the note is signed "Beau Geste".

That is the second mystery and for that we go back in time and learn about the Geste brothers, Beau, Digby and John. All were present when the sapphire was stolen and all confessed and ran away to join the French Foreign Legion. Adventures ensue.

This is a very entertaining read, more than just an adventure/mystery tale it is also about loyalty and doing the right thing, or perhaps the wrong thing but for a very good reasons.

After I read the book I saw the movie Beau Geste (1939) with Gary Cooper and Ray Milland and others. I'm not a Gary Cooper fan, but the movie was pretty good. It stayed faithful, more or less to the book.

P.S.: P.C. stands for Percival Christopher. There is some speculation that Percival Christopher was actually in the Foreign Legion, based in part by how accurate his descriptions of Legion life were but there is no proof of this. There are two sequels to this book "Beau Sabreur" and "Beau Ideal". Both have good reviews but I haven't read them.

Rafeeq O. says

P.C. Wren's 1924 *Beau Geste*, a seemingly dated novel of mystery and adventure, with settings that range from the comfortable drawing rooms of the landed gentry of an idealized England to the blazing deserts of a savage North Africa whose colonization is presented only with approval, actually remains quite a decent three-and-a-half- to four-star read.

The reader must understand, of course, that this book is not the place to look for modern notions of cultural tolerance, let alone cultural *respect*, of class, or of writing conventions. Nevertheless, once some of the cuteness of presentation and style is past--for things do get better as the plot moves forward--and so long as one can shrug at the occasional casual bits of racism or classism as being expected in a piece of this era,

Beau Geste can be enjoyed for what it is.

Most of us reading this book have been brought to it, I presume, by the rousing black-and-white 1939 film version starring Gary Cooper, Robert Preston, and Ray Milland, along with Brian "Rapid fire, you dogs!" Donlevy. The broad strokes, therefore, are familiar--

When the electricity flickers out at stately old Brandon Abbas one night as Aunt Patricia allows her charges to view the magnificent "Blue Water" sapphire, the great jewel disappears before the lights come back on. 'Tis no mere practical joke, however, and although it is impossible that any of the handful of youth in the room could have stolen the thing, honorable Michael "Beau" Geste lights out for the territories the next day in the hope of taking the scandal upon himself rather than letting others face questioning and the sully of their names. Soon his brothers Digby and John separately lam out as well so that the blame might be spread, and since all recall their childhood dream of joining the French Foreign Legion, that is where the jolly trio meet again.

Adventure and camaraderie ensue. Villains abound, whether jewel-hungry scoundrels, a commander so sadistic that he had to flee even the notorious Belgian Congo, mutineers suspicious of betrayal, or stereotypical bloodthirsty Arabs of the ululating and sword-waving variety. Just as the cruel Lejaune--reluctantly backed by the three Geste brothers and a few more friends, who hate their commander's unjust and savage ways but hate rising against the apparently glorious "Tri-coloure" even more--likely is about to order the mutineers shot, Tuaregs swarm over the horizon, and all must defend the desert outpost against the hordes. Whenever a legionnaire is shot, the wily Lejaune props the dead or dying man at the parapet with rifle pointed outward in bluff, until finally Beau is hit, and then...

Well, but we of course know all this, don't we? Indeed, the foreknowledge from the movie makes it difficult, really, for the reader to envisage exactly how the original 1924 reader would have experienced the opening flashback mystery. Before we learn of the supposed jewel theft in England, after all, we see a relief column reach a lonely desert fort to find its besiegers driven off, its garrison all eerily dead at the posts...and yet, despite the apparent lack of life within the walls, there occurs inexplicable funny-business such as finding the snarling commander dead with a French bayonet in his heart while a peaceful-looking man has been laid out beside him, artifacts being moved, an investigating trooper vanishing, and finally a spontaneous fire that consumes any possible evidence. These are interesting puzzles, and I wish I could have done justice to Wren's work by recapturing the first response that must have been intended.

The book does start rather slowly, though. The opening pages of third-person narrative belong to a British officer in the Nigerian Civil Service--again, God bless Empire, apparently--who from an old friend in the French military hears the tale of coming upon the fort and its mysteries. The presentation is somewhat cutesy, with an ebullient Frenchman being played off against a phlegmatic Englishman who punctuates the former's Gallic extravagance with laconic little quips and 1920s slang, for example, and the mostly-monologue telling seems to go forever. Tension is heightened, though, when Beaujolais reveals that the peaceful dead man is one whom they both knew...and whose aunt, married to a spendthrift hunter of worldwide game both four- and two-legged, remains a bit dearer to Lawrence's heart than he quite dare admit.

In any event, once the opening tale closes, the rest of the book is John Geste's first-person narrative giving the backstory of the Geste brothers and their childhood in Brandon Abbas, the disappearance of the jewel, and the brothers' Foreign Legion adventures, right up through Beaujolais' discovery of the fort and its burning, and beyond--to escape across thousands of miles of desert with a pair of hickish but experienced and loyal American comrades in arms. John's tale begins with a jesting, superior sort of style that occasionally wears a tad thin, but the farther we go, the better it gets. The notion of facing death at the hands of mutineers, a ruthless commander, or torturing Arabs can be faced down with a stiff upper lip, eh, what?--but, really, there is good emotion here, too, as in the friendship for the quaint-speaking yet stout Yanks, the

agony of losing one brother and then another, and the final selfless search of one of the ex-Texas Rangers for the companion who in his disappearance in the trackless desert most likely gave his life for this companions. At the end, of course, there will be marriages, with both John and Lawrence returning to merrie olde England--Sir Hector fortunately has died of well-deserved cholera, so Patricia is free once more--but I confess that these don't interest me as much as the months and months of travails in the Sahara.

Now, elephant-in-the-room-wise, I suppose I at least should comment a little further on the worldview of the novel. On the one hand, as Brian Stableford notes in the Afterword of my edition, not everything is about race and class here--there are good Europeans and bad ones, the unrefined Americans are noble in their honesty and simplicity, and the sedentary rather than raiding Arabs often are rather decent...though they are not spared from the superior loftiness of the English outlook here and there, of course. Clearly in Wren's picture of the world, white Europeans--namely the English, especially the upper-class English and, perhaps, the country-cousin Americans--are the best, and Arabs and black Africans are the worst, and even other European lands fit into this twentieth-century Great Chain of Being, with the amusing French being a hair lower on the scale than the laudable and complacent English, the plodding Germans being a bit lower still, then sneaky South Europeans such as the Italians, and so on. An occasional racial epithet occurs most casually on occasion, and the portrayal of the Jewish pawnbroker is not necessarily the least slanted piece of writing, shall we say.

Such sociopolitical artifacts of the time of writing are to be expected, though, so the reader who understands what a different world 1924 was should not be too shocked, or even appalled, no matter how appalling some sentiments would be today. More lastingly, the action of *Beau Geste*, as action, is exciting, as are the intrigues and double-dealings and subplots of the ruffians who menace the amiably joking brothers. What truly lasts here is Wren's investigation of duty: duty to family, duty to friends, even duty to the organization to which one has sworn allegiance--though our post-Nuremberg perspective will find the protagonist's reasoning in this last one not as developed as we would like. Loyalty here is a matter of honor, for it is loyalty to what is *right* and good rather than selfish...and although some of what the book finds "good" is not, the striving for what is right should not ever go out of style.

Calzean says

I remember as a child watching *Beau Geste*, the ghostly dead men on the fort parapets and the viking fortress. I had not realised what a frolicking good adventure/mystery book that Mr P.C. Wren had penned covering a stolen gemstone, the French Foreign Legion, mutiny, self sacrifice, loyalty and a happy ending. Some very dated language and views but the English men are all gentlemen and that is all that mattered in those days.

Lora says

Rousing tale of grim deeds and satirical heroic characters. A real page turner, and while not a completely happy ending, it wrapped up well. Glad I finally read it.

Side note: the descriptions of heat in the desert may be a good aid in getting through your February, if that's what you need.

Manny says

When people talk about running away and joining the Foreign Legion, they're probably referring to this book, even if they don't know they are. Stirring British Empire stiff-upper-lip stuff. There is a fantastic scene near the end which I often think of.

Jacqueline says

Is this book why I named my son Beau? I don't know but I'm pretty sure it was in the back of my mind when it came time to name him. :-) I read this when I was around 13 to 15. I loved it and am planning to read it to my boys as soon as I think they can tolerate the language. A great adventure story with the French Foreign Legion. What could be better? It's not a perfectly crafted novel but is wonderful anyway.

Elisabeth says

I stayed up till a quarter to midnight to finish it, so I think that says something for the blend of mystery and adventure...

Hal Johnson says

Beau Geste is pretty much the perfect book. It's more or less about some jewel thieves who flee to the French Foreign Legion to escape capture. Once in the middle of the desert, they find that a psychotic and sadistic commandant wants them dead so he can claim the jewel; a cabal of Mediterranean-types wants them dead so they can claim the jewel; the other Legionnaires want them dead so they can murder the psychotic commandant our heroes are too noble to mutiny against; and the Bedouins want them dead because atrocity is their bread and butter. There's also a "ghost fort" populated with dead men, a childhood spent blowing up toys, ancient ruins, heroic last stands, and cowboys versus bandits in the desert. It would be difficult to improve this book without bringing in dinosaurs.

When it was first published, in 1924, it must have been terrible. You would never guess the book was written in 1924--it reads like something from the 1870s. Presumably more knowledge of the political situation in Algeria than I possess could help someone pinpoint when events take place, but the attitude of the book, and all its characters, is unapologetically high Victorian. One expects a certain amount of casual racism in any book of imperialist adventure, and, indeed, the Bedouins are murderous savages who delight in torture and exist only to massacre and plunder others; they are also ugly--but *Beau Geste* is perhaps unusual in the extent of its classist assumptions, in its utter contempt for any country situated south of France (cowards and thieves to a man), in an astonishingly overt anti-Semitism (mainly evinced in one long, painful, "humorous" scene featuring a poorly dressed Nosferatu-troll of a pawnbroker who is consistently referred to as a "child of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob"), and in its self-admiration for the phlegm, vigor, and stoicism of the British upper classes. (Americans come in for a few digs, but overall they are cast in a positive, even admirable, light; although they uniformly speak in an American accent so replete with "authentic" slang that I can't make heads or tails of what they are saying.) In 1924 this would probably strike too close to home, and I'd be rolling my eyes so much that the book would be hard to read. But nowadays it just blends in with the

innumerable prejudices of the past.

This is the kind of narrative that can only be forgiven in a pre-World War I world, in which violence is glorious, and everyone with, you know, a real job must make way for the Romantic escapades of a privileged few. This is true of most adventure stories: insofar as every adventure is an internal journey projected onto and reified in the external world. There's a certain amount of immaturity in believing the teleological fallacy: that the external world is "for" one's own maturing and growth, and the pathetic fallacy: that the external world can in any way reflect one's one emotional or mental states. There is, therefore something immature about adventures, and they work best in an adolescent context, or, if we are dealing with grown-ups, in the immaturity of the pre-modern world.

Robert Hays says

I have the good fortune to have access to a great collection of classics from my late father-in-law's 1930s and '40s library. Beau Geste is one of the books I was a long time getting to, and that's a shame. What a read! I know it was made into a movie--maybe more than once, I'm not sure--and so if you watch classic movies you may have seen it. With an exotic setting that features the French Foreign Legion, how could it fail? But I promise that if the opening scene of Beau Geste doesn't grab you, you are hopeless as a reader of clever adventure stories.

Sarah Booth says

The book the helped create the lure of joining the French foreign legion.

A gem disappears and brothers, not knowing who is guilty, go off and join the French foreign legion to try and protect each other and unravel the mystery. Among the cut throats and the insanity, brothers grow close and make a couple of American friends who they owe their lives to over and over again. It's real adventure and told in a way that keeps you wondering how and why up until the very end. If you like swash buckling type adventures and deserts, this is for you. You might discover that you like them more than you realized.

Jim says

I've read that a classic is a book that is never finished saying what it has to say. I further define one by it being a great story hidden behind awful, dated writing that has been butchered by Hollywood, & forced upon too-young souls by sadistic English teachers. This book escaped half of the usual criteria.

First & foremost, not one of my sadistic English teachers (I went to a prestigious prep school & had many.) ever forced me to read this book, thankfully. It's taken me years to get over some of the prejudices they helped me form & I still have plenty to go. (What's next? Dickens?!!! No! That's one I cherish...)

This is a GREAT story & will never finish speaking to people. It is a wonderful mystery that defines the best of England's young men; truthfulness, self sacrifice, loyalty, amazing courage, strength, & fortitude, along with the quite understandable romance & idiocy of ideological youth. It's an incredible journey full of hard choices & great characters that made the youthful, ridiculous choices seem perfectly logical - at least in their eyes. Best of all, the story is exceedingly well crafted to bewilder the reader while laying out all the clues to bring it to a stunning, perfectly sensible, & satisfactory conclusion.

The original, superficial mystery of the story seems obvious; the fort being manned by the dead, but that quickly gives way to the main mystery when John tells his story. He & the other characters all seem too good & honest to have done 'The Bad Thing'. He seems to be quite a reliable narrator, too. The majority of the book shows the brothers facing hardship & crisis with perfect moral rectitude & aplomb. So who could have done it? This uncertainty until the very end of the book is a constant spur.

Along the way, I was treated to some of the most vivid scenes. Once the first mystery is solved, the real adventure begins although it takes up far less space in the book, about the last 20%. H. Rider Haggard wrote books about far fewer & lesser adventures than what Wren has John skim through. This understatement, along with the uncertainty of time, makes the journal even more credibly incredible. There are no dates. Only Lawrence gives us an account of time in terms of his life & then only if the reader can recall it from the first part. (view spoiler)

Unfortunately, the writing style is one that is guaranteed to put me to sleep instantly when read on the page. The first few pages are frankly impenetrable. Even with an excellent narrator, the first few pages drag, but I managed to get through them & then patiently finished the chapter & the second. While the 2 chapters of Part 1 do contain some important information, they make up about 20% of the book - far too much telling. A synopsis would have been a blessing. It's in Part 2 where the story really pops & grabbed me. After that, I was completely hooked.

Geoffrey Howard's wonderful reading brings the story to life. I envisioned a cross between Michael Caine in the movie *The Man Who Would Be King* (1975) & Peter O'Toole as *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) telling John's story. Howard epitomized the English voice perfectly capturing the understated courage, loyalty, & humor. Unfortunately, he made cartoon caricatures out of the Americans, although some of that was how they were written. Still, his voice for them went over the top.

Hollywood never ruined this story for me, either. While I know I've seen both the 1926 silent movie & the 1966 remake, I don't think I ever watched either one all the way through. I did watch the 1939 version completely, but that was decades ago, so I retain a few of the most memorable scenes only. Telly Savalas probably did a wonderful job as the deranged sergeant.

This story also captures a different mindset of Colonialism in a pretty perfect way. There is no question of morality in the occupation of the land, but the Gestes do not seem to feel that they are better than the natives as a people. I'm sure some will think the book totally racist since 'nigger' & other pejoratives are used a couple of times, but they're mostly just convenient labels without any derogatory meanings in their minds. The Gestes don't seem to look down on specific races, but to group various peoples according to their lot in life. Race, nationality, & religion have less to do with their judgement than the education, demeanor, & actions of the various peoples they meet. Any prejudice they have seems to be the finest of survival mechanisms as they navigate the labyrinth of tribes & the conundrums that each poses for them. In a short amount of time, at their own expense, they learn the Arabic language, customs, & religion so thoroughly they can disguise themselves as such. This speaks not only of a high degree of intelligence, but honest curiosity & respect.

This is another example of an audio book coming to the rescue. Not only was I able to keep getting chores done, but I was able to really enjoy a book I'd never been able to get through before. As much as I'd like to give this book 5 stars, I can only give it 4 due to the horrible beginning & the caricature of the Americans.

Michael says

This is one of those books I have wanted to read since I was in Junior High School. I loved the movie with Gary Cooper that I saw as a kid and have since rediscovered it on DVD and watch it periodically. The book did not disappoint although the beginning dragged on a little and although I knew what was going on having seen the movie I feel it would be a bit unintelligible for someone reading this for the first time and not knowing the story.

The story is "the" classic story of the French Foreign Legion. The idealized notion in boys of "running away" to join the Foreign Legion was still a fanciful daydream for boys when I was young. This story is the epitome of that as well as the ideals of honor and chivalry.

The story revolves around the relationship of 3 inseparable brothers, Michael (Beau), Digby (his twin), and John Geste. They are orphans raised by their Aunt Patricia at Brandon Abbas (think Downton Abbey). Aunt Patricia's ne'er do well husband, Hector is never home as he galavants around the world on hunting trips and chasing women and spending the family fortune. The fortune is epitomized in their famous "Blue Water" Sapphire which has been appraised at 30,000 pounds. The "Blue Water" is stolen one evening and only 8 people were present at the time who could have stolen it: Beau, Digby, John or their cousins Isobel, Claudia, and Augustus as well as a Chaplain and Aunt Patricia herself. Shortly thereafter Beau leaves a letter stating that he stole the "Blue Water" and disappears, followed shortly by Digby and then John all professing to have stolen the famous Sapphire. They all end up joining the French Foreign Legion. Their adventures in the Legion make up the latter part of the book and it is where the story really takes off. There are battles, treachery, heroes and villains and I agree with many others who have read this book that this is a classic adventure written for boys (or the boy in all of us). It's a romance, a mystery, and an adventure classic. The mystery of the disappearance of the "Blue Water" sapphire does not get answered until the very last page but you are so taken up in the story that it is almost an afterthought to put the finishing touches on this entertaining tale.

BTW the edition I read is attached here and I do not recommend this edition if you can find a better one. The printing is very small and even with glasses it was a chore at times to read more than a few pages at a time.

Jc says

I have seen each of the film versions of this, including Marty Feldman's "Last Remake...", at least 3 times each (NOTE: don't bother with the 1966 Doug McClure/Leslie Nielsen/Telly Savalas version!!; the 1926 & 1939 versions are both must see). But, I had never read the book before. It is very much a 1920s romantic adventure, and the model for many a Fr.Foreign Legion book and film made since then. Don't expect a modern novel, but if you have fun with The Saint and other adventure/mystery books from this period you will enjoy this one. And the basic story is a classic.

Mike (the Paladin) says

This is one of those books I've been meaning to read since...well since i was a kid. Gary Cooper is Beau Geste for me. I'll say this...that old movie isn't too far from the book and it captures the book's adventure.

Told from the beginning by a Frenchman (who of course gets the "compliment" that he's like an Englishman) telling the spooky, frightening, foreshadowing/climactic tale of Fort Zinderneuf. He lead the relief column to the fort which he found unfallen with it's gates closed and locked...but entirely manned by the dead.

I suppose the story/plot is familiar to many who'll read this from the movie I mentioned and others (though if the only movie you've seen is "The Last Remake of Beau Geste" starring Marty Feldman you may not have exactly the idea of the plot found in the book). It's a classic story of honor, bravery and self sacrifice.

Why only 3 stars...well, I just couldn't get past the story telling/writing style that is very dated. I felt the same way about The Four Feathers. The story is moving and exciting. The story telling style is more slow and dated than readers today will be used to.

It sort of drove me crazy at times.

I hate to admit that.

So, good story...dated story telling. Enjoy.
