

**GUY DE
MAUPASSANT
CONTES CHOISIS**

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Guy de Maupassant Contes Choisis by Murray Peabody Brush

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MURRAY PEABODY BRUSH

**GUY DE
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*EDITED WITH BIOGRAPHY, NOTES, AND
VOCABULARY*

BY

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PREFACE

In making the accompanying selection of Maupassant's stories the editor has sought as far as possible to choose those which present the different phases of the author's life and which illustrate his varied talent. It has been necessary to include a few stories which have been already edited elsewhere, but the greater number appear now for the first time in a school edition. As the text is accompanied by a full vocabulary, the notes have been reduced to a minimum.

My thanks are due Professor Armstrong and Dr. Gruenbaum of The Johns Hopkins University for several valuable suggestions, and to the latter for having read the proofs.

MURRAY P. BRUSH.

BALTIMORE, *May*, 1916.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
Biographical Note	v
<i>L'Infirmé</i>	3
<i>La Légende du Mont-Saint-Michel</i>	12
<i>La Bête à mail' Belhomme</i>	19
<i>Découverte</i>	32
<i>À Cheval</i>	40
<i>Une Vendetta</i>	52
<i>La Relique</i>	60
<i>Toine</i>	68
<i>La Ficelle</i>	83
<i>Sur l'Eau</i>	94
<i>La Parure</i>	104
<i>Le Père Mongilet</i>	118
Vocabulary	129

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

It is something of a paradox that in the work of a writer who believed absolutely in the doctrine of the impersonality of the author in his writings, we should find in almost every line an intimate reflection of the author's actual life. Guy de Maupassant, a child in the distinctive province of Normandy, hardly more than a youth in the government offices at Paris, a writer of the young literary set, drew constantly upon his surroundings for the facts and settings of his delightful stories; yet nowhere in them does a single statement show the moral bias or the personal opinions of their author.

Henri-René-Albert-Guy de Maupassant was born August 5, 1850, in the Seine-Inférieure, not far from Dieppe. He died at Paris on July 6, 1893. The Maupassants were an old family, originally from Lorraine, but Guy's mother, Laure Le Poittevin, was of the *haute bourgeoisie normande*, and both Guy and his single brother Hervé were Normans through and through. It was only natural that this should be the case for M. de Maupassant and his wife had an early separation and the boys were brought up entirely by their mother. Mme de Maupassant was equal to her task. She was a talented woman; as a girl she and her brother, Alfred, had had as best friends and playmates

Gustave Flaubert and his sister Caroline, and she understood the boy's point of view as well as the girl's. From the first she set out to be her sons' intimate friend, she shared their games as well as their studies, and encouraged heartily the budding inclination toward the literary life which early appeared in Guy. First of all she taught him to see, she called his attention to "the life of things, fixed his wandering imagination upon realities, . . . made him understand and love nature, interested him in the changing aspect of the sea and sky, in the flight of the gulls over the waves, in the play of the sunlight on the cliffs and countryside, in the thousand little details of the rich Norman country." * While Guy's talents were thus awakened, it must be confessed that his elementary schooling was rather slighted. He studied with one tutor and another, for a short time was at the Seminary at Yvetot, and finally entered the *lycée* at Rouen from which he eventually received his bachelor's degree. During all these years his real life was in the woods and fields. He ran all over the country, making friends with every one, developing a wonderful physique, and storing in his mind the countless incidents which were to fill his stories later. From his schooldays dates Maupassant's love of a practical joke. On one occasion, when home on vacation, he dressed up as a young girl, called upon a most proper English dowager of the neighborhood,

* For these and other biographical details consult E. Maynial, *La vie et l'œuvre de Guy de Maupassant*, Paris, 1906, and A. Lombroso, *Souvenirs sur Maupassant*, Rome, 1905.

and by his outrageous remarks shocked the dear lady almost to death. Later, at Paris, he loved to get on the train with some staid bourgeois, then carefully holding some innocent package, he would pretend to be carrying an anarchistic bomb to its fatal destination; if he succeeded in making the bourgeois call in the police, he was overjoyed. Again, at the height of his fame, in Mme Adam's drawing room, he turned the conversation upon cannibalism. Some one asked, "Vous avez mangé de l'homme?"—"Non," he replied sweetly, "de la femme; c'est délicat et savoureux, j'en ai repris."

The Franco-Prussian war came just as Guy finished school, he enlisted, served through a campaign, and added another field to his experience. After the war, he obtained a clerkship in the Navy Department, changed for a slightly more lucrative post in the Department of Public Education, and settled down to a humdrum life at the desk. It was a pretty hard task for the big, out of doors fellow, who, as Flaubert said, looked like a "young Breton bull." In one of his stories, *la Mouche*, Maupassant pictures to us his feelings: "I was a penniless employee. I had in my heart a thousand modest and unrealizable desires which gilded my existence with every imaginable expectation How simple, and good, and hard it was to live this way, between the office at Paris and the river at Argenteuil! My great, single, absorbing passion was the Seine. Ah! the beautiful, calm, ever-changing, and vile smelling river, full of mirages and filth! I