

**PIERRE
AND JEAN**

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Pierre and Jean by Guy de Maupassant

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Pierre & Jean

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH
BY CLARA DELL

WITH A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION
BY THE EARL OF CREWE

A FRONTISPIECE AND NUMEROUS
OTHER PORTRAITS WITH
DESCRIPTIVE NOTES BY
OCTAVE UZANNE

P. F. COLLIER & SON
NEW YORK

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IN the long portrait-gallery of men of letters there are many figures, including some of the most famous, which in one aspect, at any rate, have baffled the analysis of countless critics. The relation between the training of these writers and their art, between the lives they led and the work they did, between their surroundings and their message, remains untraced and obscure despite every effort of loving or malicious research. Thus, above all others, it is with Shakespeare; and thus it would remain if every fact of his daily existence were known to us. Thus, in differing degrees and for various reasons, it is with Cervantes and Swift, with Keats and with Heine. Others, on the contrary, stand out clearly as the best product of the particular set of circumstances grouped about their lives. They seem to be the finished result of a given up-bringing, of a precise tutelage, and of a chosen career. Of this second category Guy de Maupassant is a singularly complete example.

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Any difficulty in classifying his genius, or in estimating the permanency of his fame, arises from no mystery enshrouding his life or his work. The evolution of each is absolutely straightforward and coherent : he traversed no " caverns measureless to man " on his way to the sunless sea which engulfed him at last. Through his single volume of verse, through his six novels, through the multitude of his short stories and *feuilletons*, the succeeding phases of a not very eventful life can be unerringly traced, like the path of an explorer on a map. There are glimpses of his boyhood at Étretat and Yvetot, of his school-days at Rouen, of his brief service as a volunteer in 1870, of his clerkship at a public department in Paris. Then, still traceable in the stories, came a spell of life in the capital, first in a small lettered society, later in a wider circle of acquaintance. From time to time there was a little travel, quite insufficient to free him from national limitations, a great deal of rowing and sailing, and a taste of fashion on the Riviera. This was all ; and amid the astonishing variety of incident found in his stories he never passed outside these simple bounds. Other great writers, though not many, have refrained from describing what they have not themselves seen. Except for a few rather unsuccessful excursions into the

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supernatural and the unnatural, Maupassant very rarely touched any class of persons, or any order of subjects, which he did not know to the core. Whenever he broke this rule, his hand somewhat lost its cunning; he was completely at home only when he moulded and remoulded for the purposes of his art every fragment of personal experience, every scrap of confirmatory information and illustration. There were not many tints on his palette; but he blended them almost to perfection.

The form in which these experiences were given to the world was regulated by the bent of a strong animal nature, by early association with a peculiar rural society, and by his intimacy with Gustave Flaubert. Never perhaps in the history of letters did the relation of master and disciple dovetail more nicely than between Flaubert and Maupassant. It was not the outcome of a casual enthusiasm on one side, or of a blind favouritism on the other, but the development of an old family friendship into a close intellectual bond. Gamaliel's yoke was not easy. For six years, steadily guiding Maupassant's course of study, and criticising its results, he forbade the publication of a single line. As his pupil had written verses furiously from the age of thirteen at latest, and did not publish a volume till he was thirty, Flaubert's

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curb was tightly applied. But Maupassant never ceased to be grateful to *l'irréprochable maître que j'admire avant tous*,* and it is pretty evident that the elder man's literary influence was exercised almost entirely for good.

As a matter of course, Maupassant first tried his wings in verse. Flaubert, when recommending *Des Vers* to the good offices of his own publisher, wrote, "His verses are not tiresome, which is the prime consideration for the public, and he really is a poet, without any stars and dicky-birds." There certainly are no stars, and prudish readers might complain that there is a certain amount of mud. One or two of the poems merely celebrate facile amours: *Fin d'amour* and *La dernière escapade* are *feuilletons* in rhyme: *Propos de rues* is a sort of Horatian dialogue, and *Venus Rustique*, the most ambitious attempt, for which Flaubert had a word of praise, possesses some of the cericness of Baudelaire, and might not have been disclaimed by Mr. Swinburne or Arthur O'Shaughnessy. But in the same year 1880, the plant which had been so long maturing, and which had been so rigidly pruned, bore its first real fruit in its true form of prose. The incomparable *Boule de suif*, which appeared with Zola's

* Dedication to *Des Vers*.

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Attaque du Moulin and other episodes of the war by different hands in a volume styled *Les Soirées de Medan*, was at once hailed by the author of *Madame Bovary* as a veritable master-piece, in a verdict which nobody has wished to dispute.

Eight years later, in his well-known preface to *Pierre et Jean*, Maupassant expounded his opinions on the writing of stories. It is a somewhat ragged piece of criticism in itself, but necessarily interesting, and demands a word here. What, he asks, are the set rules for writing a novel? The answer is simple: there are no such rules. A story can only be a personal conception, transfigured by its author into his personal realisation of a work of art. As Mr. Kipling puts it:

“ There are nine and sixty ways of constructing tribal lays,
And every single one of them is right! ”

The artist, then, says Maupassant, is in a sense the slave of his personality; he must write as he can, not as he would. Romantic or realist, he must follow his bent. The goal, therefore, of training such as Maupassant's own is not the attainment of an absolutely best method, but the discovery of the special subject and the scheme of treatment which are most in harmony with the writer's mind. As Louis Bouilhet, another early