

THE NECKLACE

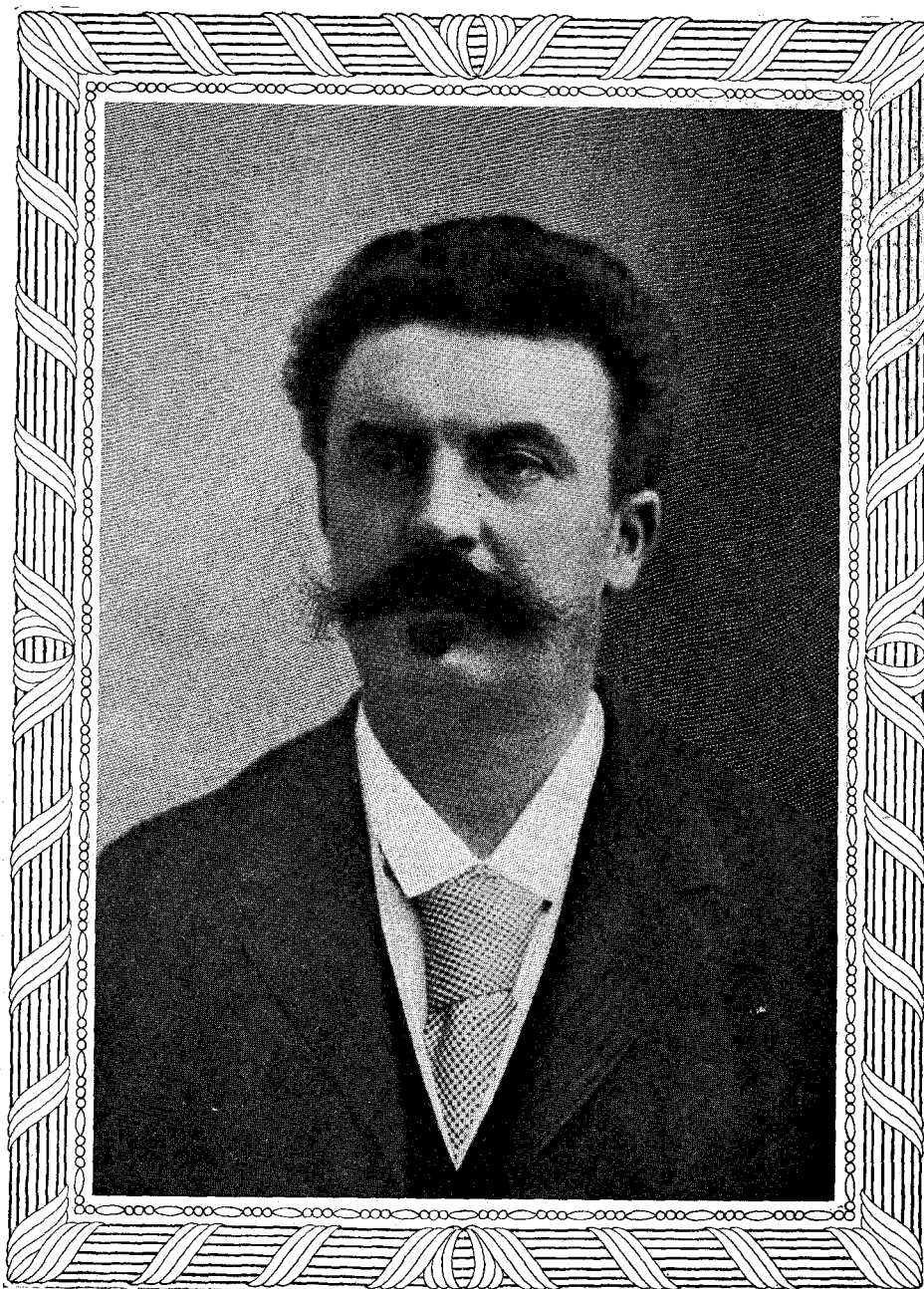
BY GUY DE MAUPASSANT

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY HAMILTON W. MABIE



HE futility of the endeavor to detach art from morality, the special and individual skill from that general force we call personality, was never more convincingly shown than in the life, death, and work of Guy de Maupassant, the foremost master of the short story. His stories, long and short, are not only confessions in the sense in which Goethe applied that word to his own work, but they are chapters in the history of a mind which destroyed itself. Years before Maupassant was in a retreat for the insane, mourning, with indescribable pathos, the loss of his ideas and vainly searching for them, the shadow of that tragic eclipse began to spread over his fiction. Almost a decade before acute mania developed, the novelist described, with a kind of shuddering ecstasy of insight and skill, the terror that lurks about the human soul, the ambush set by the invisible world with which the soul is encircled. This haunting sense of hostile presences hidden on every side, ready to spring out of the unseen, relentless and silent with malignant fate, gave "Horla," in the light of later events, a terrible personal significance. In "Lui," which appeared in 1884, this sense of unseen horrors about one's path found striking expression: "I am afraid of the walls, of the furniture, of the familiar objects which seem to me to assume a kind of animal life. Above all, I fear the horrible confusion of my thought, of my reason escaping, entangled and scattered by an invisible and mysterious anguish."

This master of a delicate art, the note of whose style was distinction, was as certainly the victim of the tyranny of his senses as the most vulgar drunkard; and the shattering of his rare and richly endowed mind, the settling over him of a cloud of "invisible and mysterious anguish," was an inevitable physiological result. Few men have started with a larger physical equipment for a long and fruitful life than this man who died at forty-three, pathetically reaching out empty hands for ideas of which nothing survived except the remembrance of a remembrance! When Maupassant published "Boule de Suif" ("Tallow-Ball"), in 1881, he was a young man who had brought from the virile soil of Normandy a vigorous physique, great strength, and the habits of an athlete. He was the nephew and, for a decade, the pupil of Gustave Flaubert, the indefatigable searcher for the one inevitable word, the exact equivalent of the thought or feeling. The author of "Madame Bovary" was tortured quite as much as inspired by this passionate quest for the ultimate phrase. "Possessed of an absolute belief that there exists but one way of expressing one thing, one word to call it by, one adjective to qualify, one verb to animate it, he gave himself to superhuman labor for the discovery, in every phrase, of that word, that verb, that epithet. . . . A thousand preoccupations would beset him at the same moment, always with this desperate certitude fixed in his spirit,—among



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all the expressions in the world, there is but one—one form, one mode—to express what I want to say." Here was a master of rare certitude of purpose and of inflexible will in pursuing it; and Maupassant, who had the form and look of a man who might have become a pugilist, learned from the author of "Salamambo" the art of writing French prose of almost flawless lucidity, simplicity, and modulated strength.

It is a marvelous style as regards precision, terseness, brevity, a certain artistic integrity which evades no difficulty, rejects every superfluous word, states the fact in its relentless and often hideous nudity. Zola, whose phrase was rarely clothed with reticence or delicacy, described Maupassant as "a Latin of good, clear, solid head, a maker of beautiful sentences shining like gold, pure as the diamond . . . having the good sense, logic, balance, power, and clearness of the old French blood." This characterization is as true in what it omits as in what it claims for the author of "The Necklace;" his style is finely ordered by the instinctive and trained logic of the French or Latin mind; but it lacks the flowing quality which comes from feeling, the exquisite and moving touch of unfeigned sympathy, the beauty that rises like a delicate aroma from a spiritual insight into life.

Flaubert was a romanticist with the method of a realist; his pupil, Maupassant, followed the fact as he saw it with inflexible interest and fidelity. He was as uncompromising a realist as Zola, but he was a much greater artist; and both selected their facts as unblushingly as did George Sand. Clear cut, with occasional plastic inspirations and moments of exquisite descriptive genius, Maupassant made himself the foremost master of the art of short-story writing in a group of writers who seemed to know instinctively the limitations and the resources of a literary form which exacts the nicest perceptions and the surest skill. He almost unerringly selected a single situation, related one or two characters vitally to it, suppressed all detail that did not contribute to portraiture, sketched a background with a few telling strokes, knit plot, character, situation, and *dénouement* strongly together to secure unity of effect; and even in such an ironic tragedy as "The Necklace," which The Outlook reprints this week in its series of foreign stories, brings out a kind of bitter pathos. He understands the art of saying much in a few words. In "Une Vendetta," in which a solitary old woman trains a dog to kill her enemy, after the crime has been committed the simple record reads: "*Elle dormit bien, cette nuit-là.*" ("She slept well, that night.") Among Maupassant's novels "Pierre et Jean" is a masterly example of relentless concentration and analysis; the skill with which a merciless inquisitor drives his mother to confess an old-time intrigue is diabolical in its sheer ability. It is in the short story, however, that Maupassant made his greatest achievements; and the long list of his tales, filling many volumes, is also a list of literary triumphs.

He who destroys the ideal destroys himself. In art and in life Maupassant lived in the lower order of facts, the brutal world of events unrelated to a spiritual order. He drained his senses of the last power of sensation and reaction; he plunged headlong into the sensual life upon which they opened when the luminous heaven above the material world was obliterated. Madness always lies that way as a matter of physiology as well as of morals, and Maupassant went the tragic way of the sensualist since time began.

on the lower order of facts which made him a naturalist made

him also a pessimist; for his manner of life inevitably bore its bitter fruit in his art. His career is a striking confirmation of the fundamental law that the artist is conditioned by the man. In his "Bel-Ami" he described the deterioration of a brain; in his work as a whole he disclosed, stage by stage, the deterioration of a soul, the disintegration of a personality. He lost the power of seeing things as they were; life became a hideous dream, full of repulsive and haunting images; and his great talent was extinguished in a madhouse.

SHE was one of those pretty and charming girls who are sometimes, as if by a mistake of destiny, born in a family of clerks. She had no dowry, no expectations, no means of being known, understood, loved, wedded, by any rich and distinguished man, and she let herself be married to a little clerk at the Ministry of Public Instruction.

She dressed plainly because she could not dress well, but she was as unhappy as though she had really fallen from her proper station; since with women there is neither caste nor rank; and beauty, grace, and charm act instead of family and birth. Natural fineness, instinct for what is elegant, suppleness of wit, are the sole hierarchy, and make from women of the people the equals of the very greatest ladies.

She suffered ceaselessly, feeling herself born for all the delicacies and all the luxuries. She suffered from the poverty of her dwelling, from the wretched look of the walls, from the worn-out chairs, from the ugliness of the curtains. All those things of which another woman of her rank would never even have been conscious, tortured her and made her angry. The sight of the little Breton peasant who did her humble housework aroused in her regrets which were despairing and distracted dreams. She thought of the silent antechambers hung with Oriental tapestry, lit by tall bronze candelabra, and of the two great footmen in knee-breeches who sleep in the big arm-chairs, made drowsy by the heavy warmth of the hot-air stove. She thought of the long *salons* fitted up with ancient silk, of the delicate furniture carrying priceless curiosities, and of the coquettish perfumed boudoirs made for talks at five o'clock with intimate friends, with men famous and sought after, whom all women envy, and whose attention they all desire.

When she sat down to dinner before the round table covered with a tablecloth three days old, opposite her husband, who uncovered the soup-tureen and declared with an enchanted air, "Ah, the good *pot-au-feu*! I don't know anything better than that," she thought of dainty dinners, of shining silverware, of tapestry which peopled the walls with ancient personages and with strange birds flying in the midst of a fairy forest; and she thought of delicious dishes served on marvelous plates, and of the whispered gallantries which you listen to with a sphinx-like smile, while you are eating the pink flesh of a trout or the wings of a quail.

She had no dresses, no jewels, nothing. And she loved nothing but that; she felt made for that. She would so have liked to please, to be envied, to be charming, to be sought after.

She had a friend, a former schoolmate at the convent, who was rich and whom she did not like to go and see any more, because she suffered so much when she came back.

But, one evening, her husband returned home with a triumphant air, and holding a large envelope in his hand.

"There," said he, "here is something for you."

She tore the paper sharply, and drew out a printed card which bore these words:

"The Minister of Public Instruction and Mme. Georges Ramponneau request the honor of M. and Mme. Loisel's company at the palace of the Ministry on Monday evening, January 18th."

Instead of being delighted, as her husband hoped, she threw the invitation on the table with disdain, murmuring:

"What do you want me to do with that?"

"But, my dear, I thought you would be glad."

such a fine opportunity. I had awful trouble to get it. Every one wants to go; it is very select, and they are not giving many invitations to clerks. The whole official world will be there."

She looked at him with an irritated eye, and she said, impatiently:

"And what do you want me to put on my back?"

He had not thought of that; he stammered:

"Why, the dress you go to the theater in. It looks very well to me."

He stopped, distracted, seeing that his wife was crying. Two great tears descended slowly from the corners of her eyes towards the corners of her mouth. He stuttered:

"What's the matter? What's the matter?"

But by a violent effort she had conquered her grief, and she replied, with a calm voice, while she wiped her wet cheeks:

"Nothing. Only I have no dress, and therefore I can't go to this ball. Give your card to some colleague whose wife is better equipped than I."

He was in despair. He resumed:

"Come, let us see, Mathilde. How much would it cost, a suitable dress which you could use on other occasions, something very simple?"

She reflected several seconds, making her calculations and wondering also what sum she could ask without drawing on herself an immediate refusal and a frightened exclamation from the economical clerk.

Finally she replied, hesitatingly:

"I don't know exactly, but I think I could manage it with four hundred francs."

He had grown a little pale, because he was laying aside just that ar-

ious. Her dress was ready, however. Her husband said to her one evening:

"What is the matter? Come, you've been so queer these last three days."

And she answered:

"It annoys me not to have a single jewel, not a single stone, nothing to put on. I shall look like a distress. I should almost rather not go at all."

He resumed:

"You might wear natural flowers. It's very stylish at this time of the year. For ten francs you can get two or three magnificent roses."

She was not convinced.

"No; there's nothing more humiliating than to look poor among other women who are rich."

But her husband cried:

"How stupid you are! Go look up your friend Mme. Forestier, and ask her to lend you some jewels. You're quite thick enough with her to do that."

She uttered a cry of joy.

"It's true. I never thought of it."

The next day she went to her friend and told of her distress.

Mme. Forestier went to a wardrobe with a glass door, took out a large jewel-box, brought it back, opened it, and said to Mme. Loisel:

"Choose, my dear."

She saw first of all some bracelets, then a pearl necklace, then a Venetian cross, gold and precious stones, of admirable workmanship. She saw also some ornaments before which she could not make up her mind. She could not make up her mind to take any of them, and she was still hesitating when she saw a diamond necklace.

kissed her passionately, then fled with her treasure.

The day of the ball arrived. Mme. Loisel made a great success. She was prettier than them all, elegant, gracious, smiling, and crazy with joy. All the men looked at her, asked her name, endeavored to be introduced. All the attachés of the Cabinet wanted to waltz with her. She was remarked by the Minister himself.

She danced with intoxication, with passion, made drunk by pleasure, forgetting all in the triumph of her beauty, in the glory of her success, in a sort of cloud of happiness composed of all this homage, of all this admiration, of all these awakened desires, and of that sense of complete victory which is so sweet to woman's heart.

She went away about four o'clock in the morning. Her husband had been sleeping since midnight, in a little deserted anteroom, with three other gentlemen whose wives were having a very good time.

He threw over her shoulders the wraps which he had brought, modest wraps of common life, whose poverty contrasted with the elegance of the ball dress. She felt this, and wanted to escape so as not to be remarked by the other women who were enveloping themselves in costly furs.

He turned her back.

You will catch cold out-
call a cab."

ten to him, and

When

She removed the wraps, which covered her shoulders, before the glass, so as once more to see herself in all her glory. But suddenly she uttered a cry. She had no longer the necklace around her neck!

Her husband, already half undressed, demanded:

"What is the matter with you?"

She turned madly towards him.

"I have—I have—I've lost Mme. Forestier's necklace."

He stood up, distracted.

"What!—how?—Impossible!"

And they looked in the folds of her dress, in the folds of her cloak, in her pockets, everywhere. They did not find it.

He asked:

"You're sure you had it on when you left the ball?"

"Yes, I felt it in the vestibule of the palace."

"But if you had lost it in the street we should have heard it fall. It must be in the cab."

"Yes. Probably. Did you take his number?"

"No. And you, didn't you notice it?"

"No."

They looked, thunderstruck, at one another. At last Loisel put on his clothes.

"I shall go back on foot," said he, "over the whole route which we have taken, to see if I can't find it."

And he went out. She sat waiting on a chair in her ball dress, without strength to go to bed, overwhelmed, without fire, without a thought.

Her husband came back about seven o'clock. He had found no trace

it mended. That will give us time to turn round."

She wrote at his dictation.

At the end of a week they had lost all hope.

And Loisel, who had aged five years, declared :

"We must consider how to replace that ornament."

The next day they took the box which had contained it, and they went to the jeweler whose name was found within. He consulted his books.

"It was not I, Madame, who sold that necklace; I must simply have furnished the case."

Then they went from jeweler to jeweler, searching for a necklace like the other, consulting their memories, sick, both of them, with chagrin and with anguish.

They found, in a shop at the Palais Royal, a string of diamonds which seemed to them exactly like the one they looked for. It was worth forty thousand francs. They could have it for thirty-six.

So they begged the jeweler not to sell it for three days yet. And they made a bargain that he should buy it back for thirty-four thousand francs, in case they found the other one before then.

"You should have returned it sooner. I might have needed it."

She did not open the case, as her friend had so much feared. If she had detected the substitution, what would she have thought, what would she have said? Would she not have taken Mme. Loisel for a thief?

Mme. Loisel now knew the horrible existence of the needy. She took her part, moreover, all on a sudden, with heroism. That dreadful debt must be paid. She would pay it. They dismissed their servant; they changed their lodgings; they rented a garret under the roof.

She came to know what heavy housework meant and the odious cares of the kitchen. She washed the dishes, using her rosy nails on the greasy pots and pans. She washed the dirty linen, the shirts, and the dish cloths, which she dried upon a line; she carried the slops down to the street every morning, and carried up the water, stopping for breath at every landing. And, dressed like a woman of the people, she went to the fruiterer, the grocer, the butcher, her basket on her arm, bargaining, insulted, defending her miserable money sou by sou.

Each month they had to meet some notes, renew others, obtain more time

change! How little a thing is needed for us to be lost or to be saved!

But one Sunday, having gone to take a walk in the Champs Élysées to refresh herself from the labors of the week, she suddenly perceived a woman who was leading a child. It was Mme. Forestier, still young, still beautiful, still charming.

Mme. Loisel felt moved. Was she going to speak to her? Yes, certainly. And now that she had paid, she was going to tell her all about it. Why not?

She went up.

"Good-day, Jeanne."

The other, astonished to be familiarly addressed by this plain goodwife, did not recognize her at all, and stammered:

"But—Madame!—I do not know—You must have mistaken."

"No. I am Mathilde Loisel."

Her friend uttered a cry.

"Oh, my poor Mathilde! How you are changed!"

"Yes, I have had days hard enough

since I have seen you, days wretched enough—and that because of you!"

"Of me! How so?"

"Do you remember that diamond necklace which you lent me to wear at the ministerial ball?"

"Yes. Well?"

"Well, I lost it."

"What do you mean? You brought it back."

"I brought you back another just like it. And for this we have been ten years paying. You can understand that it was not easy for us, us who had nothing. At last it is ended, and I am very glad."

Mme. Forestier had stopped.

"You say that you bought a necklace of diamonds to replace mine?"

"Yes. You never noticed it, then! They were very like."

And she smiled with a joy which was proud and naïve at once.

Mme. Forestier, strongly moved, took her two hands.

"Oh, my poor Mathilde! Why, my necklace was paste. It was worth at most five hundred francs!"

Letters to The Outlook