

(FROM THE FRENCH OF GUSTAVE GUESVILLER.)

“The young are eager for martyrdom.”

A STORY FOR CHILDREN.



MY friends make fun of my weakness for the colour of *yellow*.

I confess that I adore it, notwithstanding that I have good reason to detest it. Truly, human nature is a bundle of contradictions!

I love yellow because of a certain episode in my life which occurred when I was but eight years of age. I love nankeen above all on account of a jacket of that material, which played in that episode an important part.

Ah! that jacket of nankeen!

How came it about that I was smitten with the insane desire of possessing such a thing? The cause is not far to seek. It was *Love!*

Love in a child of eight? Why not? You will see presently that I speak without any exaggeration.

At that now distant time we resided at Auxerre.

I knew how to read, write, and count. For the further progress of my education I was sent to a small day-school, kept by two

maiden ladies—humble, gentle souls, who in affectionate care for their pupils satisfied in some degree their instinct of maternal tenderness.

Poor Demoiselles Dulorre!

Our school, which had been placed under the pious patronage of Saint Elisabeth, was a mixed one. That is to say, up to the age of ten years, boys and girls worked and played together. In spite of occasional quarrels, the system, on the whole, worked very well.

I had not been eight days at Saint Elisabeth's before I fell in love. Do not laugh! I loved with all the strength of my child-nature, with a love disinterested, simple, sincere.

It was Georgette whom I loved, but, alas! Georgette did not love me.

How much I suffered in consequence! I used to hide myself in corners, shedding many tears, and racking my brains to find some means of pleasing the obdurate fair one. Labour in vain, a thankless task, at eight years of age or at thirty!

To distinguish myself in my studies, to win

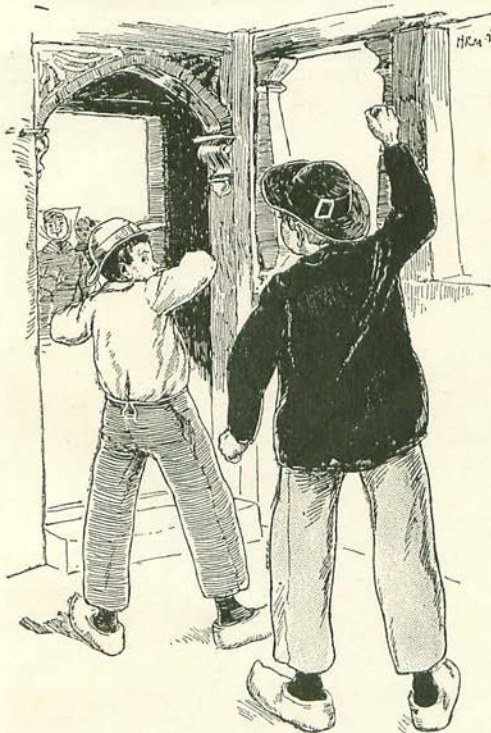
by my exemplary conduct the encomiums of the sisters Dulorre—all this made no impression upon cruel Georgette. She made no secret of her preference for a dull, idle, blustering fellow of nine years old, who won all the races, who could fling a ball farther than anyone else, carry two huge dictionaries under his arm, and administer terrible thumps.

This hero was rightly nicknamed *Met-à-Mort*.

I knew what his blows were like, having been the involuntary recipient of some of them. Some, do I say? I had received more than a dilatory donkey on the road to the fair!

And Georgette had only laughed!

Obviously, it was absurd to think of employing physical force against my redoubtable rival, and intellectual superiority in this



“MY REDOUBTABLE RIVAL.”

case availed me nothing. I determined, therefore, to annihilate *Met-à-Mort* by my overpowering magnificence.

Naturally, our parents did not send us to school attired in our best clothes. On the contrary, most of us wore there our oldest and shabbiest garments. Consequently, I opined that it would be no difficult achievement to outshine all my schoolfellows.

I should have to coax my parents into loosening their purse-strings, and get them to buy me a beautiful new jacket.

It took me a very long time to decide what colour this jacket should be. I mentally reviewed all the colours of the rainbow. Red tempted me; but I doubted whether a jacket of that colour would be attainable. Should it be blue, green, indigo, violet? No! Not one of these colours was sufficiently striking.

I paused at yellow. That might do. It is a rich colour; there is something sumptuous and royal about it. Summer was approaching. I decided finally upon a jacket of nankeen.

Without delay, I set to work on my school garments. It was a work of destruction, for I wanted to make them appear as disreputable as possible. I slyly enlarged the holes, wrenched off the buttons, and decorated my person lavishly with spots and stains of all kinds. Day by day I watched, with a secret joy, the rapid progress of this work of dilapidation.

In what I judged to be an opportune moment, I timidly expressed my desire.

I had to do more—much more than that—before I could obtain my will. I begged, stormed, grumbled, sulked. I became almost ill with hope deferred. At length, for the sake of peace, my parents granted my eccentric wish.

It was a proud moment for me when, for the first time, I arrayed myself in that resplendent nankeen jacket, won at the cost of so many struggles and persevering efforts. Standing before the mirror, I surveyed myself admiringly for a full hour. I was grand! superb!

“Ah! my Lord *Met-à-Mort*! You will find yourself ousted at last! My shining jacket will soon snatch from you the *prestige* acquired by your stupid, brute force. Georgette, astonished, fascinated, dazzled, and delighted, will run towards me, for I shall now be the handsomest boy in the school. *Met-à-Mort* will weep for chagrin, as I have so often wept for jealousy and mortification.”

Such were my complacent reflections as, with the stride of a conqueror, I entered the precincts of our school.

Alas for my rose-coloured anticipations! I was greeted with a broadside of laughter. Even our gentle mistress, Ermance Dulorre, could not repress a smile, and, above all other voices, I heard that of Georgette, who cried mirthfully:—

“Oh! look at him! Look at him! He is a canary-bird!”

The word was caught up instantly. All the scholars shouted in chorus: "He is a canary! A canary!"

Words fail me to describe my bitter disappointment, my burning shame and chagrin. I saw my folly now. But it was too late—the awful deed was done! Worse than all, in order to obtain this now odious jacket, I had spoiled all my other jackets, and had nothing else to wear! When, on the evening of that most miserable day, I told my troubles to my father and mother, they were merely amused, and said to me:—

"It is entirely your own fault. You insisted upon having the jacket, and now you must put up with it!"

Thus was I condemned to the perpetual wearing of my yellow jacket, which entailed upon me no end of petty miseries.

Every day, at school, I was jeered at and insulted. Even the babies of three years—sweet, blue-eyed, golden-haired cherubs—pointed at me with their tiny fingers, and lisped, "Canary! Canary!"

How was I to extricate myself from this extremely unpleasant situation? One upper garment still remained to me—an old, thick, heavy, winter mantle. The idea occurred to me that I might utilize this to conceal my too gorgeous plumage. We were now in the month of June, and the weather was tropical. No matter! In class and playground, I appeared buttoned up in my big cloak, bathed in perspiration, but happy in having hidden my shame.

To Mademoiselle Ermance's expression of surprise, I answered that I had a cold. I did not deviate widely from the truth. Two days later, thanks to this over-heating, I had a very real one.

The device did not serve me long. My parents found me out, and promptly deprived me of my protecting shell, thus obliging me to attend school again in the costume of a canary. The former annoyances re-commenced.

Vacation time was at hand, and Georgette, of whom I was more enamoured than ever, remained still cold and indifferent.



H.R. Miller
1893.

"I WAS JEERED AT AND INSULTED."

One day we were playing the game of brigands and gendarmes. I was one of the gendarmes, who were invariably beaten.

Met-à-Mort had nominated himself captain of the brigands, and chose Georgette for his *vivandière*.

Presently, for a few minutes there was a suspension of hostilities. Brigands and gendarmes fraternized, as they quenched their thirst, and expatiated upon the joys of the fray. Suddenly Georgette, with her accustomed vivacity, broke in upon our little group. She bore in her hands a glass ink-bottle.

"See!" said her sweet voice. "Whoever will drink this ink shall, by-and-by, be my little husband!"

Met-à-Mort and the rest exploded with laughter.

When we resumed our game, I discovered that I had lost all interest in it. Georgette's words haunted me.

Cries of joy arose from our camp. The enemy's *vivandière* had been captured. I was told off to guard the prisoner; you may guess whether I was happy!

Georgette tried bribery.

"Oh! let me go! let me go! and I will give you ten pens."

Much I cared for her pens!

"Did you mean what you said just now, mademoiselle?" I timidly inquired.

"What?"

"That whoever would drink the ink should be your little husband?"

"Yes, stupid! But let me go—"

"Then it is true?"

"Of course it is. Let me go!"

She was growing impatient.

For a moment I hesitated; then I said:—

"Run away quickly! nobody can see us."

She did not need telling twice. As swiftly as her feet could carry her, she ran off to the enemy's camp.

I was a double-dyed traitor. After conniving at my captive's escape I deserted.

"Can it indeed be true?" I pondered. "Have I only to drain that phial of ink in order to become Georgette's husband some day? She said so, and she must know!"

I went to look for the ink-bottle, which the child had carried back into the school-room. There I stood contemplating the black, uninviting-looking liquid.

Not for a single moment did I dream of swallowing the loathsome stuff in the girl's presence. It did not occur to me that she ought to be a witness of my sacrifice, or that she had demanded it as a proof of love. My idea was rather that the beverage was a sort of love-philtre, such as I had read of in my book of fairy tales. She had said: "Whoever will drink the ink shall be my husband."

Faugh! the bottle was full to overflowing. How nasty it looked! Never mind! So much the better! I should have liked it to have been nastier still.

I closed my eyes, and raised the bottle to my lips.

"What are you about, you dirty little thing?" exclaimed a voice from behind me, at the same instant that I received a smart blow upon my uplifted arm.

Covered with confusion, I turned, and beheld Mademoiselle Ermance, who had surprised me in my singular occupation.

"What is the meaning of this nonsense?" said she, with unwonted severity.

I had no time to explain. Just at that moment

my schoolfellows came trooping in. Georgette seeing me standing there, ink-stained and disgraced, and already—the coquette!—forgetful of her promise, exclaimed, with a face of disgust:—



"SHE WAS GROWING IMPATIENT."

"Oh, the dirty boy! The nasty, dirty boy!"

Everything, however, has its bright side. Mademoiselle Ermance's tap and my own

child? Does she ever think now of those old times? How often have I dreamed of her! I have forgiven her for the tears which she caused me to shed. Her charming face



"WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS NONSENSE?"

start of surprise, had jerked the ink-bottle from my grasp; my yellow jacket was literally flooded! I was rid of it at last!

It was to Georgette that I owed this happy deliverance. I thank her for it to-day! What has become, I wonder, of that lovely

dwells always in my mind as a pure ray from the bygone light of youth. I am not her husband, and probably never shall be. I am resigned to my fate, which I richly deserve, because——

I did not drink the ink!