

HOME AND SOCIETY.

Old Valentines.

FOR a long time past it has seemed that the festival of that immortal go-between, St. Valentine, has been elbowed to the rear among our social observances, his perennially smiling visage turned to the wall, as it were, like a first wife's portrait, while a hundred little loves-in-waiting stand by with torches all unlit. One must rest content to rank among persons of a certain age in recalling the sweet stir once produced in a household by the anniversary of this legendary saint. Ah! then, from dawn till evening, what a flutter in the dovecote! what sickness of hope deferred until the mail disgorged its treasures! what radiance of blushing triumph when it did! Then pretty Dorothy stole away to her bedroom, clasping close the contents of her apron-pocket, and Sally and Betty took refuge among the pickle-jars in the store-closet, to exchange their dimpling confidences unobserved.

Woful works of art were those love-tokens in which Sally and Betty took delight! Within their gilt-edged borders sat die-away maids and bachelors, clasping hands under the chaperonage of an apoplectic Cupid, who held aloft a pair of hearts skewered upon his shaft. Beneath were amatory stanzas of the skim-milk school. Or else, when the envelope was removed, there was revealed a sort of golden bird-cage, which, on being pulled like a door bell, brought to view an altar where Hymen stood expectant. Again there was a screen of tinsel and lace-paper inscribed with this delicious mystery, "Within you will find my love." Needless to say that on lifting this, the maiden saw—a mirror! Over such sweet and transparent devices were showered rhymes like those still to be found nestling in the colored papers of mottoes distributed at juvenile parties, and composed off-hand, presumably, by the confectioner's young men.

A better period in the annals of valentine lore was that in which original stanzas, both strong and sweet, were the vehicles by which love was declared. Such a time we should like to see return. A fair sheet of paper, bearing in honest characters the expression of genuine sentiment, whether poetical or otherwise, would outweigh, in the balance of a sensible girl's opinion, a ream or two of printed prettiness. For an example, we may look far back upon the calendar of the merry saint, and there find attributed to an immortal pen the daintiest of old valentines, which, it is supposed, was addressed to Anne Hathaway:

"Is there inne heavenne aught more rare
Than thou sweete nympe of Avon fayre,
Is there onne earthe a manne more trewe
Than Willy Shakespeare is toe you?"

"Though fickle fortune prove unkynde,
Still doth she leave herre wealth behynde
She ne'ere the heart canne forme anew,
Nor make thy Willy's love unnetrewe.

"Though age with withered hand do stryke
The form most fayre, the face most bryghte,
Still doth she leave unnetouched ande trewe
Thy Willy's love and freynshyppe too.

"Though death with neverre faylinge blowe
Doth manne and babe alyke brynge lowe,
Yette doth he take naughte but his due,
And strykes notte Willy's heart still trewe.

"Synce thenne not fortune, death nor age
Canne faythfulle Willy's love asswage,
Thenne doe I live and dye forre you,
Thy Willy syncere and most trewe."

To cast lots for one's valentine, who was, by the same token, to remain chained to the chariot-wheel of his enslaver for the ensuing year, was a custom of the seventeenth century, observed both in France and England. That this fashion was not altogether popular, we gather from more than one chronicler of the day,—were, indeed, one's knowledge of human nature in all ages to leave a doubt on the subject! Another custom demanded of a young lady practicing it on St. Valentine's eve a variety of occult devices, among them that of eating a hard-boiled egg, shell and all, with salt in place of the yolk, just before going to bed. Then, without quenching her thirst, the maiden sought her pillow on which was pinned four bay-leaves. Of course she was to dream of her valentines, and an artless votary has thus recorded her success, in a letter to her friend: "Would you think it, Mr. Blossom was the man? I lay abed and shut my eyes all the morning till he came to our house; for I would not have seen another man before him for the world!" Pepys, who is nothing if not practical, confides to his journal for February 14, 1667, the following prudent comment on his fortune for the day: "I am this year my wife's valentine, and it will cost me five pounds. I find that Mrs. Pierce's little girl is my valentine, she having drawn me, which I was not sorry for, it easing me of something more which I must have given to others." Elsewhere, Mr. Pepys refers to the fact that one of Miss Stuart's valentines (the Duke of York) "did give her a jewel of about eight hundred pounds." Touching old valentines of a later date, we copy one from a paper yellow with age and crackling at the touch. It was found in the lacquer dressing-box of a belle of by-gone days, wrapped in a bit of saffron lace, and faintly scented with vanilla bean. The lady to whom the lines were penned had lived and died single:

HER VALENTINE.

"This merry maiden, radiant, rare,
With winsome ways and debonair,
When sweet she smiles on me, I swear
That Eden's light is resting there
Upon those lips so ripe, so fair!
To look upon her face, old Care
Would cease to carp and court Despair,
Would give up dole, his trade forswear,
Don sunny looks, make Joy his heir.
What wonder, then, that I should dare
Her praise to sing, her colors wear,
Her valentine myself declare?
This merry maiden, radiant, rare!"

Constance Cary Harrison.

Careless Speech.

CONVERSATION as a fine art has fallen much into neglect. We seem to be relapsing into a belief that speech is merely a medium of exchange, and that, so long as the meaning is clear, it matters little if the vehicle be crude. But it is a mistake to think that we can use language with slap-dash incoherence, and con-