

WOMAN and HER WORK.

What to do with old letters is getting to be almost as serious a question as, "what becomes of the hairpins?" and quite as difficult to answer. I do not mean the ordinary everyday letters, for which there can be no other destiny than to be read, and then dropped into the fire; the letters I am thinking of have a value that makes burning or tearing them up, out of the question—they seem like living things, and are too sacred to be even handled carelessly. They are treasured tenderly, guarded jealously and prized above all things, but alas! they do accumulate so rapidly, and they take up so much room.

I don't know of anything funnier than the war between sentiment and convenience which seems to rage perpetually in both the heart and the upper bureau drawer of an engaged girl, whose lover lives at a distance from the object of his affections! No earthly power would induce the loyal soul to destroy one of dear Charlie's letters, they seem like a part of himself and the mere fact that his hand has not only touched them, but his precious tongue, so eloquent in its protestations of undying affection, has moistened the flap of the envelope, is enough to set that particular heap of white-winged messengers apart from every other letter that ever was written. But still Charlie's pen is almost as eloquent as his tongue, he writes every other day and never less than four sheets will suffice to tell the object of his affections all that happened on the intervening day when he did not write, so his missives are naturally of robust proportions, and require a good deal of space to accommodate them. At first Charlie's love tries to keep them neatly sorted in tin bundles tied with blue ribbon and arranged in the order in which they were received, the first one always on top, and the last one slipped loosely underneath the pile for convenient reference and frequent reading over.

But before long the pile grows so high that the drawer will not shut, and then a second mound is started, and a third, and the dates begin to get mixed up, and the ribbons break, and by and by there is no room for collars and cuffs, ribbons and gloves, so the letters are tenderly transferred to a trunk, where they can be kept under lock and key and are much safer, even if they are not as accessible, and therefore less frequently read.

The engagement is a long one, and as there is no abatement of affection on either side, and the postal rates continue to be favorable to frequent interchange of ideas through the medium of the mails, it is not long before that trunk is filled, and the first time its owner needs it to accompany her on a visit the scene of preparation for packing, can be better imagined than described! Every available box, bag, and drawer in her room is filled to overflowing with letters before the trunk is emptied, and while she is away the accumulation continues, so that she has to crowd the rest of her belongings into a smaller space, and make room for more luggage than she carried away.

And yet to burn one of those precious missives would be little less than sacrilege, so the mountain keeps growing until some happy day when the lover becomes the husband, and persuades his bride to let him help her sort the old letters out, and burn the most of them, since there is no room in the house for such a collection of documents and he cannot afford to build extra wing for their accommodation.

But the old love letters do not always come to so peaceful an end; sometimes the blue-ribboned bundles cease by slow degrees to grow larger, and the written words grow colder and colder, until at last there is no need to keep them under lock and key, because they might be published in a newspaper without attracting any attention; and at last they are no longer added to at all, but still they are treasured, and nothing could induce their owner to part with them or burn them, even the coldest of them; they are all she has now, and strange to say, she reads them much oftener than a happier woman would. Not the later ones, but the first bundle, the ones filled with endearing words and protestations of a love which was to outlast the world itself. The love died so soon, so cruelly rude, but the written words that expressed it live on in a strange mockery of the evanescence of human love; as contrasted with the permanence of paper and ink.

Those letters never leave the quiet woman who reads them so often, where she goes they go too, and though she makes many resolutions about burning them, habit is stronger than nature, and by-and-by she would just as soon think of burning off her right hand, as of destroying those mementos of youth and happiness.

Some day an old maid dies, in her pathetic will is found a clause requesting her executor to burn unopened, a certain sealed parcel which will be found in her desk—one, I knew of, asked that the package be placed in her coffin, and buried with her—and at last the letters and their owner have faded out of existence together, and the long companionship is over.

But the treasured missives are not

always love letters: There is the first invitation to a children's party, the first the child ever received, and which she could not read herself, but valued none the less for that; the letter grandpapa wrote her the time he went to England, with the bit of pressed fern he picked in the crystal palace to send his little granddaughter. Then there are the letters mother wrote her when she was away at school, and the briefer and more infrequent letters that father used to write when he had time. And later on letters from her brothers, and from her school friends; trifling enough at the time they were received perhaps, but precious now, sanctified by time, by long absence from the writers, and alas, too often by death! Here is the little sheet of pink paper covered with straggling printed characters sprawling all over the page, written laboriously by the baby sister who was so proud of being able to write a letter. She never lived to get beyond printing, but died when she was six years old. And here is a bold scrawl from the favorite brother, the dear and chosen "chum" who was drowned the first year he went to college. Oh there are so many treasures amongst those old letters! So many scraps of faded paper that are absolutely priceless, and yet what shall we do with them, how shall we keep them so they shall be safe from prying eyes, and yet not lost, not destroyed, so we may never read them again, or touch the paper where a dear dead hand has rested? I scarcely know because I do not like to say, even to myself that there is no more dangerous possession in the world than a collection of old letters, that a bag of dynamite is scarcely more unsafe, or more likely to spread unexpected destruction all around! No one was ever so careful, or cautious since the world began, that there was not something in her letters she would not wish to be seen, by any eyes but those it was intended for, and unfortunately we cannot always live to guard our secrets, or those of our friends.

Some day death will come to us all, and he often comes so unexpectedly that even one poor little hour to set our affairs in order, is not granted to us. What of our letters then? Strangers will perhaps have the task of sorting them, going over them to see if there is anything of importance amongst them, and will read with a smile of amusement words we would almost have guarded with our lives from any eyes but our own. Perhaps the very most secret thoughts and sorrows of a heart which has long lain under the daisies will be laid bare to the curious eyes of a perfect stranger, or worse still to the last one in the world, the writer would have wished to know them.

And so I say that time has taught me the only safe place for letters, and that is—the fire! Who can tell into what hands they will fall if they are preserved, but the fire is safe and it tells no secrets again?

Some people make their letters into fragments, and using them as a sort of stuffing, but who would want dead and gone words forever whispering into their ears every time the paper rustled? And if they are to be destroyed why not burn them outright? It seems hard at first to destroy what one prizes so much but even the dear dead body we have loved so in life must at last be put out of sight, and why not the dead words?

Burn your letters girls, have a great housecleaning at the beginning of each year, and if you feel you must keep some, make them as few as possible at first, but then away in an old cigar box, or something you can easily drop into the fire any time, and some day you will find that you let common sense triumph over sentiment, because you must remember that the writer, as well as the recipient of a letter should be considered and that to leave private letters exposed to the risk of being read by strangers is a very great injustice to the people who have trusted you with their secrets, and relied on your discretion in keeping them.

The season of abstinence is nearly over now, and the busy housewife turns her thoughts towards the Easter menu with almost as absorbing interest as the frivolous dandy bestows upon the selection of her Easter bonnet. Whether we believe in fasting or not, we all seem to agree upon the subject of having something very much better than usual for dinner on Easter Sunday, and we would fain observe the following day also as a sort of least tapering off gradually through the serious stages of hot turkey with bread sauce, and jelly; celery and lettuce accompaniments, followed by mince pie, plum pudding, fruit, nuts and raisins—Cold turkey with cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes fried over, pudding, warmed over pie; and finally stewed turkey bones and fried potatoes atoned for by a nice fresh lemon pie, and a cup of coffee afterwards, until by Saturday we have reached the old level, and are quite contented with our customary beefsteak and onions, turnips and tapioca pudding.

Here are some recipes for dainty, but not too expensive additions to the Easter bill of fare, but first of all, though I may be a little late in the day, I want to give

my readers, a recipe for the good old English Good Friday cakes.

Hot Cross Buns.

Make a sponge with one quart of water, cold, one yeast cake and one teaspoonful of salt. When light add half a teaspoonful of melted butter, one heaping cupful of brown sugar, one egg, one pound of Zante currants and a tablespoonful of ground allspice. Knead well, but not too stiff, with flour. Let it rise again, then make into biscuits (without rolling the dough), and let them rise over again. When ready for the oven, gash across the top of each with a sharp knife. They are good either hot or cold, with or without being buttered. Do not place too near together in the pan, as they look better to be rather flat. Be careful not to cut the cross too deep. A slight gash made after they have risen will show very plainly when baked.

Perhaps it is just as well I did not publish this recipe last week, as I intended to, because of course no good church people will be thinking of eating hot cakes on Good Friday, so they will come in twice as well for Easter Monday. The cut on the top which gives the bun its name, should be quite deep, and cover the whole top in a Maltese cross.

Here is an appetizing breakfast dish which may be prepared at night and then cooked in a very few minutes in the morning.

Beef Brissoles.

One cup of finely chopped cold beef, one cup of fresh bread crumbs, half a teaspoonful of mixed herbs, half a teaspoonful of grated lemon peel: salt and pepper to taste. Mix the meat, crumbs, lemon peel and seasoning, add one well beaten egg, and mix all into a thick paste, and make into balls or croquettes; roll first in egg, then in biscuit crumbs and fry in deep lard for three minutes. Garnish with parsley, and serve very hot.

It is usually almost impossible to obtain poultry of any kind at this time of year, but somehow the exceptionally cold winter seems to have reversed the general order of things and the market is rich in turkeys, geese, chickens and even ducks, so chicken salad is not an unobtainable luxury for Easter this year. Here is an old recipe which I have not yet tried myself, but which sounds very good, and has cabbage substituted for the usual celery, which is difficult to get now.

Chicken Salad.

Chop fine one chicken cooked tender; one small head of cabbage and five, cold, hard-boiled eggs; season with salt, pepper and mustard. Warm half pint of vinegar; add half a teaspoonful of butter, stir until melted, pour hot over the mixture, stir thoroughly and set away to cool.

Here is a recipe which is undeniably troublesome but so delicious when finished that it fully repays all the trouble. It is the original southern recipe for chicken croquettes, and makes "a dainty dish to set before"—anyone. All the butchers are well supplied with veal for the Easter trade, just now, so the sweetbreads are easily obtained if you speak for them a few days before you want to use them. I must say that I differ with many authorities who say that sweetbreads should not be cooked longer than 20 minutes. Ours are always most delicious, and we treat them as we do a ham, in cooking, simmering, not boiling, them for an hour taking great care that they do not break, and lose their shape; when they are quite tender they are set aside to get cold, and are then ready for frying, or croquettes.

Chicken Croquettes.

One four-pound chicken, one small onion, one bay leaf, one pair sweetbreads, four whole cloves, one sprig parsley. Clean and singe the chicken. Then put it on to cook in boiling water, add the onion, bay leaf, cloves and parsley. Cover and simmer gently until the meat is very tender. While this is cooking prepare the sweetbreads. Trim all the fat and pipes off, wash well in cold water and soak for fifteen minutes, drain, cover with boiling water, add one teaspoonful of salt and simmer over a moderate fire for twenty minutes. Do not boil, as it makes them very tough. When done throw them into cold water for a few minutes remove the fibrous skin from the outside and chop the sweetbreads fine with a silver knife. A steel knife spoils the flavor on account of the acids they contain. As soon as the chicken is done remove the skin and bones, put them back in the kettle to simmer longer, add salt, and the liquor may be used for soup. Chop the meat very fine, then mix it with the sweetbreads, and to every pint of this meat allow one half pint of milk or cream, one large tablespoonful of butter, two large tablespoonfuls of flour, one large tablespoonful of chopped parsley, one teaspoonful of onion juice, one teaspoonful of salt, one quarter teaspoonful of nutmeg (grated), cayenne pepper to taste. Put the milk on to boil in a farina boiler. Rub the butter and flour to a smooth paste, then stir it into the boiling milk, and stir continually until it is very thick; take it from the fire, add the meat and beat until thoroughly mixed; add the seasonings, then turn out on a large plate to cool. When cold and hard form into cone shaped croquettes. Dip first in egg and then in bread crumbs and fry in boiling oil or fat. Serve at once with a small sprig of parsley in the top of each croquette.

In all the following recipes the sweet breads have been first prepared by par-boiling.

Fried Sweetbreads.

Cut in slices about three quarters of an inch thick, dry them well and dip first in egg, then in bread crumbs, fry in good lard or butter, until they are light brown, then serve on buttered toast, and sprinkle with some good piquante sauce, such as Worcestershire or Harvey, just before serving.

Fricassee Sweetbreads.

Slice half an inch thick, thicken some veal gravy with flour and butter mixed, add a tablespoonful or two of cream, a good pinch of mushroom powder, and the

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same amount of grated lemon peel, salt, white pepper and nutmeg. Stew these ingredients together for a few minutes add the sweetbreads and simmer for 20 minutes, stir well and serve garnished with sippets of toast.

Sweetbread Croquettes.
Take two sweetbreads, half a small onion chopped fine, a piece of butter the size of a small egg, and a tablespoonful of cream, season with salt, white pepper and a dash of cayenne. Beat up one egg and mix altogether with enough breadcrumbs to make into balls. Fry in lard until a nice brown, and serve hot with a garnish of parsley.

Sweetbreads make a delightful relish for invalids, it well boiled, and then covered with bread crumbs, a little pepper and salt, a bit of butter, and then browned lightly in the oven.

Raspberry Cream.
Put 6 ounces of raspberry jam to a quart of cream; pulp it through a lawn sieve; add to it the juice of a lemon and a little sugar, and whisk it till thick. Serve it in a dish or glasses.

Pineapple Jelly.
Soak half a box of gelatine an hour in a cup of cold water and stir in a cup of sugar. Add a little more than a half a cup of the liquor drained from a can of pineapple and half a pint of boiling water. Strain, stir in a cupful of the pineapple chopped fine; turn into a mold and set on ice.

Here is a recipe for small cakes to be eaten with coffee. One heaping teaspoon of sugar, three-quarters of a cup of butter, one-half cup of milk, two eggs, two teaspoonfuls of baking powder, about two cups of flour or enough to make a soft dough. Roll and cut into small cakes as thin as a water, cream the butter and sugar thoroughly and proceed as for other cake. Cinnamon is the spice generally used for these cakes.

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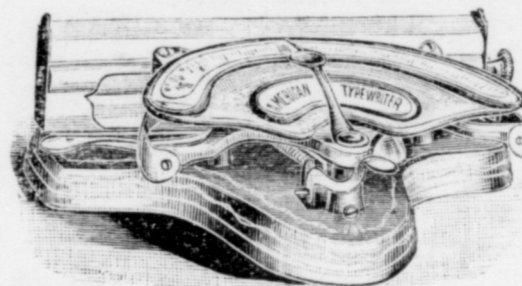
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