

Miss Jemima's Valentine.

Two crimson spots appeared upon Miss Jemima's pale face when she heard the gate-latch click. She knew that her brother was bringing in the mail, and, as he entered the room, she bent lower over her work, her crochet needle flew faster and she coughed a slight cough. But she did not look up.

She knew, without looking, that her brother brought in a pile of valentines in his hand, and that when presently he should have finished distributing them to his eager sons and daughters, her nephews and nieces, he would come and bring one to her—or else? He would not do this last. It was this dread that brought the crimson spots to her cheeks.

It there was one for her he would presently come, and, leaning over her shoulder, he would say, as he dropped upon her lap the larger, handsomer one than all the others; 'This looks mighty suspicious, Sis 'Mimie,' or, 'We'll have to find out about this,' or maybe, as he presented it, he would covertly shield her by addressing himself to the younger crowd after this fashion:

'Ef I had a lot o' boys and girls, an' couldn't get bigger valentines from all my sweethearts an' beaux than my ol' auntie can set still at home an' git 'em, I'd quit tryin'—that's what I would.'

There was always a tenderness in the brother's manner when he handed his sister her valentine. He had brought her one each year for seven years, now, and after the first time, when he had seen the look of pain and confusion that had followed his playful teasing as he had presented it, he had never more than relieved the moment by a passing jest.

The regular coming of 'Aunt Jemima's valentine' was a mystery in the household.

It had been thirteen years since she had quarrelled with Eli Taylor, her lover, and they parted in anger, never to meet again. Since then she had stayed at home and quietly grown old.

Fourteen years ago she had been in the flush of this, her only romance, and St. Valentine's day had brought a great, thick envelope, in which lay, fragrant with perfume, a gorgeous valentine. Upon this was painted, after the old Dresden china pattern, a beautiful lady, with slender waist and corker curls, standing beside a tall cavalier, who doffed his hat to her as he presented the card that bore her name, so finely and beautifully written that only very young eyes could read it unaided.

By lifting this card, one might read the printed rhyme beneath—the rhyme so tender and loving that it needed only the inscription of a name on the flap above it to make it all sufficient in personal application to even the most fastidious.

This gorgeous affair was so artfully constructed that by drawing it pictured front forward it could be made to stand alone, when there appeared a fountain in the background, and a brilliant peacock with argus-eyed tail, a great rose on a tiny bush and a crescent moon. The oldest children had been very small when this resplendent confection had come into their home. Some of them had not been born, but they had all grown up in the knowledge of it.

There had been times in the tender memories of all of them when 'Aunt 'Mimie' had locked her door, and because they had been very good, let them take a little peep at her beautiful valentine, which she kept carefully locked away in her bureau drawer.

They had on occasions been allowed to wash their hands and hold it—just a minute. It had always been a thing to wonder over, and once—but this was the year it came—when her sky seemed as rosy as the ribbon about her waist—Miss Jemima had stood it up on the whatnot in the parlor when the church sociable met at her brother's house, and everybody in town had seen it, while for her it made the whole corner of the room beautiful.

But the quarrel had soon followed—a foolish lovers quarrel—Eli had gone away in anger—and that had been the end. Disputes over trifles are the hardest to mend, each party finding it so difficult to forgive the other for being angry for so slight a cause.

And so the years had passed. For ten long years the beautiful valentine had lain carefully put away. For five years Jemima had looked at it with tearless eyes and a hardened heart. And then came the memorable first anniversary when the children of the household began to celebrate the day, and tiny comic pictured pages began flitting in from their school sweethearts. The realization of the new era was a shock to Miss Jemima. In the youthful merriment of those budding romances she seemed to see a sort of reflection of her own long-ago joy, and in the taint glow of it she felt impelled to go to her own room and to lock the door and look at the old valentine.

With a new, strange tremor about her heart and an uneasy hand she took it out and when in the light of awakened emotion she saw once more its time-stained face and caught its musty odor, she seemed to realize again the very body of her lost love, and for the first time in all the years the fountains of her sorrow were broken up, and she sobbed her tired heart out over the old valentine.

It Miss Jemima had not found joy, she had at least found her heart again—and sorrow. Her life had been for so long a weary, treeless plain that in the dark depth of the valley of sorrow she realized, as something only from sorrow's deeps poor mortals man know it, the possible height of bliss.

For the first time since the separation, she clasped the valentine to her bosom and called her lover's name over and over again, sobbing it, without hope, as one in death agony. But such emotion is not of death. Is it not the rebirth of feeling? So it was with Miss Jemima, and the heart stillness that had been her safety during

all these years would never be hers again. There would never again be a time when her precious possession would not have a sweet meaning to her—when it would be a tangible embodiment of the holiest thing her life had known.

From this time forward, as an offset to the budding romances about her, Miss Jemima would repair for refuge and a meager comfort to that which, while in its discolored and fading face it denied none of life's younger romance, still gave her back her own.

Miss Jemima, in her suddenly realized young love setting, had become, to her own consciousness, old and of date gone by.

But there is apt to come a time in the life of the live single women of forty—if she be alive enough—when in the face of even negative and affectionate disparagement she is moved to declare herself.

One thing, indeed, it was to own a yellow, time-stained valentine, and quite a different one to be of the dimpled throng who crowded the Simpkinsville postoffice on Valentine's day.

'I reckon then young ones would think it was perfectly re-diculous if I was to git a valentine at my time of life,' Miss Jemima said, aloud, 'o her looking glass one morning. It was the day before St. Valentine's of the year following her day of tears.

'But I'll show 'em!' she added, with some resolution, as she turned to her bureau drawer.

As she did show them. On the next day a great envelope addressed to Miss Jemima Martha Sprague came in with the package of lesser favors, and Miss Jemima suddenly found herself the absorbing center of a new interest—an interest that after having revolved about her awhile flew off in suspicion toward every superannuated bachelor or widower within a radius of thirty miles of Simpkinsville.

It had been a great moment for Miss Jemima when the valentine came in, and a trying one when, with genuine old-time blushes, she refused to open it for the crowd.

How she felt an hour later, when, in the secrecy of her own chamber, she took from its new envelope her own old self-sent valentine, only 'He who has tender knowledge of maidenly reserves and sorrows will ever know.

There was something in her face that forbade cruel pursuit of the subject when she returned to the family circle, and so, after a little playful bantering, the subject was dropped.

But the incident had lifted her from one condition into quite another in the family regard, and Miss Jemima found herself unconsciously living up to younger standards.

But this was ten years ago, and the mysterious valentine had become a yearly fact.

There had never been any explanations. When pressed to the wall, Miss Jemima had, indeed, been constrained to confess that 'certainly every valentine that she had ever gotten had been sent by a man' (how sweet and sad this truth!)

'And are all the new ones as pretty as your lovely old one, Aunt 'Mimie?'

To this last query she had carefully replied:

'I ain't never get none that ain't very bit an' grain ez pretty ez that one—not a one.'

'An' why don't you show 'em to us then?'

Such obduracy was indeed hard to comprehend.

The valentine had hitherto always been mailed in Simpkinsville—her own town. This postmark had been noted and commented upon, and yet it had seemed impossible to have it otherwise. But this year, in spite of many complications and difficulties, she had resolved that the envelope should tell a new story.

The farthest point from which, within her possible acquaintance, it would naturally hail was the railroad town of—let us call it Hope.

The extreme difficulty in the case lay in the fact that the postoffice here was kept by her old lover, Eli Taylor.

Here, for ten years, he had lived his reticent bachelor days, selling plows, and garden seed and cotton prints and patent medicine, and keeping postoffice in a small corner of his store.

Everybody knows how a spot, gazed at intently for a long time, changes color from red to green and then to white.

As Miss Jemima pondered upon the thought of sending herself a valentine through her old lover's hands, the color of the scheme began to change from impossible green to rosy red.

By the only possible plan by which she could manage secretly to have the valentine mailed in Hope—a plan over which she had lost sleep, and in which she had been aided by an illiterate colored servant going

there, to return next day—It must reach her on the day before Valentine's. This day had come and gone, and her valentine had not returned to her. Had the negro failed to mail it? Had it remained all night in the postoffice—in possession of her lover? Would she ever see it again? Would her brother ever, ever, ever get through with the children and finish giving out their valentines?

Miss Jemima had not long to wait, and yet it seemed an age, before the distribution was over, and she felt rather than saw her brother moving in her direction.

'Bigger an' prettier one 'n ever for Aunt 'Mimie this time—looks to me like,' he said, as at last he laid the great envelope upon her trembling knee.

'Don't reckon it's anything extra—in particular,' she answered, not at all knowing what she said, as she continued her work, leaving the valentine where he had dropped it; not touching it, indeed, until she presently wound up her yarn in answer to the supper bell. Then she took it, with her work-basket, into her own room, and dropping it into her upper bureau drawer, turned the key.

The moment when she broke the new envelope each year—I tell at night alone in her locked chamber—had always been a sad one to Miss Jemima, and tonight it was even a sadder ordeal than ever. She had never before known how she cared for this old love token.

As she sat tonight looking at the outside of the envelope, turning it over and over in her thin hands, great hot tears fell upon it and ran down upon her fingers, but she did not heed them. It was, indeed, a meager little embodiment of the romance of a life, but such as it was, she would not part with it. She would never send it out from her again—never, never.

It was even dearer now than ever before after this recent passage through her lover's hands. At this thought she raised it lovingly and laid it against her cheek. Could he have handled it on without a thought of her? Impossible. And since he had thought of her, what must have been the nature of his thoughts? Was he jealous—jealous because somebody else was sending his old sweetheart a valentine?

This year's envelope, selected with great pains and trouble from a sample catalogue and ordered from a distant city, was a fine affair profusely decorated with love symbols.

For a long time Miss Jemima sat enjoying the luxury of nearness to her lover that the unopened envelope had brought her before she felt inclined to confront the far-away romance typified by the yellow sheet within. And yet she wanted to see even this again—to realize its recovery.

And so, with thoughts both eager and fearful, she finally inserted a hairpin carefully in the envelope, ripping it open delicately on two sides, so that it might come out without injury to its frail, perforated edges. Then, carefully holding its sides apart, she shook it.

And now—Something happened. One of God's best traits is that He doesn't tell all He knows—and sees.

How Miss Jemima felt or acted, whether she screamed or fainted, no one will ever know, when, instead of the familiar pictured thing, there fell into her lap a beautiful, brand new valentine.

It was certainly a long time before she recovered herself enough to take the strange thing into her hands, and when she did so, it was with fingers that trembled so violently that a bit of paper that came within the valentine fluttered and fell beyond her reach. There it lay for fully several minutes before she had strength to move from her seat to recover it.

There was writing on the fluttering fragment, but what it was and why Miss Jemima wept over it and read it again and again are other trifling things that perhaps God does well not to tell.

However, in this particular case, it may be interesting to know that the woman who took charge of the old lover's room in Hope and who had an investigating way with her, produced seven or eight torn scraps of paper collected at this period from his scrap basket, on each one of which was written, in slightly varying terms, bits of rough sketches like the following: '—sending you this new valentine just as hearty as I sent the old one eighteen years—'

'You shall never want for a fresh one again every year long as I live, unless you take—'

'If you want the old one back again and me along with it.'

One of the lowest things that even a depraved and unprincipled person ever did is to collect torn scraps from anybody's waste basket and to read them. To print them or otherwise make them public is a thing really too contemptible to contemplate in ordinary circumstances. But this case, if intelligently considered, seems somewhat exceptional, and perhaps it is well to do so, for, be it borne in mind, all these scraps, without exception, and a few others too sacred to produce even here, are the things that Eli Taylor, postmaster, did not send to his old sweetheart, Jemima Martha Sprague.

Miss Jemima always burned her scraps, and so, even were it well to condescend to seeking similar negative testimony from her concerning her laboriously-written reply, it would have been quite impossible. Certain it is, however, that she posted a note on the following day, and that a good many interesting things happened in quick succession after this. And then?

There was a little, quiet middle-aged wedding in the church on Easter Sunday. It was the old lover's idea to have it then, as he said their happiness was a resurrection from the dead, and belonged to the Easter season, and there was no one to object.

The old man Eli, in spite of his indomitable pride, had come out of his long silence with all due modesty, blaming himself for many things.

'Ain't fitten for you, Jemima, honey, no mo'n I was eighteen years ago,' he said, his arm timidly locking her chair, the night before the wedding, 'but ef you

A SUCCESSFUL EVANGELIST.

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REV. W. A. DUNNETT.

From the Smith's Falls Record,

Throughout Canada, from the western boundary of Ontario to the Atlantic Ocean, there is no name more widely known in temperance and evangelistic work than that of the Rev. W. A. Dunnett. Mr. Dunnett has been the Grand Vic-Councillor of Ontario and Quebec in the Royal Templars, and so popular is he among the members of the order that in Montreal there is a Royal Templars council named "Dunnett Council" in his honor. For more than ten years Mr. Dunnett has been going from place to place pursuing his good work, sometimes assisting resident ministers, sometimes conducting a series of gospel temperance meetings independently, but always laboring for the good of his fellows. While in Smith's Falls a few months ago in connection with his work he dropped in the Record office for a little visit with the editor. During the conversation the Record ventured to remark that his duties entailed an enormous amount of hard work. To this Mr. Dunnett assented, but added that in his present physical condition he was equal to any amount of hard work. But it was not always so, he said, and then he gave the writer the following little personal history, with permission to make it public. He said that for the past thirteen years he had been greatly troubled with a pain in the region of his heart, from which he was unable to get any relief. At times it was dull, heavy pain, at others sharp and severe. Oftentimes it rendered him unfit for his engagements, and at all times it made it difficult to move. His trouble was always visible to the public and frequently when conducting service he would give out and doctors had to be called in to attend him. This occurred to him in the Yonge street church, Toronto; the Baptist church, Woodstock, N. B.; the Methodist church, Carleton Place, Ont. On another occasion while preaching to an audience of 2,500 people in the Franklin

Street Congregational church, at Manchester, N. H., five doctors had arrived and were in attendance before he regained consciousness. In all these cities and towns the newspapers freely mentioned his affliction at the time. Mr. Dunnett said he had consulted many physicians, though he said, to be entirely fair, he had never been any great length of time under treatment by any one doctor because of his itinerant mode of life. In the early part of the summer of 1896, while in Rockville assisting the pastor of the Wall street Methodist church in evangelistic services, he was speaking of his trouble to a friend who urged him to try Dr. Williams' Pink Pills, and next day presented him with a dozen boxes. "I took the pills" said Mr. Dunnett, "and I declare to you I am a well man today. I used to worry a great deal over the pain about my heart, but that is all done now, and I feel like a new man." All this the reverend gentleman told in a simple conversational way, and when it was suggested that he let it be known, he rather demurred, because, as he put it, "I am almost afraid to say I am cured, and yet there is no man enjoying better health today than I do."

At that time, at Mr. Dunnett's request, his statement was only published locally, but now writing under the date of Jan. 21st, from Fitchburg, Mass., where he has been conducting a very successful series of evangelistic meetings, he says:—"I had held back from writing in regard to my health, not because I had forgotten, but because it seemed too good to be true that the old time pain had gone. I cannot say whether it will ever return, but I can certainly say it has not troubled me for months and I am in better health than I have been for years. I have gained in flesh, hence in weight I would prefer not to say anything about my appetites; like the poor, it is ever with me. Yes; I attribute my good health to Dr. Williams' Pink Pills, and you have my consent to use the fact."

keered enough about me to warm over the little valentine I sent you nigh twenty years ago, and to make out to live on it, I reckon I can keep you supplied with just ez good ez that fresh every day an' hour. But befo' I take you into church I want to call yo' attention to the fac' that I'm a criminal li'ble to the State's prison for openin' yo' mail—an' if you say so why, I'll haf to go'

'Well, Eli,' Miss Jemima answered quite seriously, 'ef you're li'ble to State's prison for what you have done, I don't know but I am worthy to go to a hotter place—for the deceit I've practiced.'


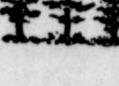
'Well,' said Eli, 'I reckon ef the truth was told, the place where we jest nachedly both b'long is the insane asylum—for the ejiots we've acted. When I reflect that I

might 'a' been ez happy ez I am now eighteen years ago, an' think about all the time we've lost—Well— How comes it that Easter comes so late this year, anyhow?'

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