Cupid's Carnival.

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Everybody knows that St. Valentine's day falls on February 14th, but probably very few can give an accurate and intelligent account of its origin, or are aware of the fact that the good St. Valentine, for whom it is named, never either directly or indirectly bore any relation whatever to its observance. When Christianity began to shed its first luminous rays over the hearts of Pagan Rome, one of the chief difficulties encountered in the conversion of those old heathens was their deep-rooted attachment to the many festivals and customs which they had so long observed in honor of their deities. The early fathers of the church found it impossible to detach them from these ceremonies. Despairing at length of being able to do so, they sought to so sanctify the form of these heathen observances as to give them a religious character, thereby transmogrifying them into Christian ceremonials held upon the same dates.

From many centuries before Christ the Romans had been accustomed to hold great feasts in honor of Pan and Juno during February, from which month the latter deity derived her additional names of Februata, Februalis and Februlis. These festivities were known as the Lupercalia, and during their continuance, among a great many other ceremonies, small tablets bearing the names of young women were placed in a box and drawn out by the young men after the manner of a lottery. Each person drawing was in honor bound to be the faithful attendant of her who had fallen to his lot from that time until twelve months had rolled around and brought another Lupercalia and a new drawing, though it not unfrequently happened that long before that time the constant association thus engendered had caused this sham engagement to terminate in a real one.

For these heathen festivities of the Lupercalia the early fathers substituted those of St. Valentine's day, thus retaining the date of the ancient festival. It has been stated that it was from the fact that St. Valentine was renowned for his universal love and charity that the custom of choosing love-partners upon his birthday and calling them by his name took its rise, but the ironclests who have long since deprived Columbus of the honor of having discovered America, who have taken away Washington's little hatchet and who have overthrown and destroyed countless other long-worshipped idols of our forefathers and market-places, have fully demonstrated the fallacy of this idea. The only reason why the christianized Lupercalia was observed on St. Valentine's day was simply to have it fall upon a sacred occasion of approximate date and to connect it with Christianity through a great saint who suffered martyrdom in the third century, being first beaten with clubs and then beheaded, while a priest at Rome, where his remains now rest in the church of St. Praxedes, and where a gate—now known as the Porta del Popolo—was formerly called in his honor the Porta Valentino.

The good churchman modified the form of the matrimonial lottery of the Lupercalia by substituting the names of particular saints to be drawn as valentines instead of the names of men and women. From this ancient usage is derived the custom, still occasionally observed in some Catholic countries, of selecting on St. Valentine Day for the ensuing year a patron saint who is called a valentine. But the young men and maidens, finding little enjoyment in drawing out the names of dead and gone saints, soon relapsed into their old custom of drawing each other, and even at the present time in many of the rural districts of England and Scotland it is customary on the eve of St. Valentine's Day, for the young people of both sexes to draw lots for a valentine, as the men draw from a bag containing the names of the maids, while the latter draw from one containing the names of the men, it generally happens that each person has two valentines, but the young men regard themselves much more strongly bound to the valentine they have drawn than to the one who has drawn them. If, as sometimes happens, a young man and woman chance each choose to draw the other, it is regarded as absolutely certain that they are destined to wed, and must not, under any circumstances, permit their attention or affection to rester elsewhere.

The custom of exchanging amatory addresses in poetry or prose between lovers on St. Valentine's Day is a very old one, dating back to the old Roman Lupercalia, when instead of a sheet of elegant note paper, a gold pen and Velinet ink, the gallant young citizens of Rome indited their valentines by means of waxen tablets and a stylus. Some of the early English poets devoted much attention to the composition of these love sonnets appropriate to St. Valentine's Day and owed their reputation largely to such works. Prominent among such was Charles, Duke of Orleans, who was taken prisoner at the battle of Agincourt, and Drayton, a poet of Shakespeare's time, whose now almost forgotten works abound in passages of rare beauty.

But written valentines long since ceased to be the fashion. The printed and painted productions of the stationers' shops supplanted them years ago, and the latter continues to grow more and more elaborate, artistic and expensive as time rolls on. An exceedingly lud description of such a valentine is given by Dickens in his "Pickwick Papers," where he tells how Sam Weller, on gazing into a stationer's window on St. Valentine's Eve, beheld a "mighty colored representation of a couple of human hearts skewered together by an arrow, cooking before a celestial fire, while a male and female cannibal in modest attire, the gentleman being clad in a blue coat and white trousers, and the lady in a sleeping red petticoat, with a parasol of the same—were approaching the meal with hungry eyes up a serpentine gravel path leading thereunto. A decidedly indelicate young gentleman, in a pair of wings and nothing else, was depicted as superintending the cooking. A representation of the spire of the church in Langham place appeared in the distance, and the whole formed a valentine."

The application of the term "valentine" to the highly colored penny woodcuts of a humorous and sometimes indecent character, having a few lines of coarse, either sentiment, dogrel printed beneath them, is an entire misuse of the word, which can only be properly applied to amatory addresses passing between lovers and sweethearts. Of late years, however, these "comic valentines," as they are called, seem even more popular than those of a sentimental character, and we all know how the stationers' windows are crowded with them at this season of the year. There is a very old superstition that even the birds choose their mates on St. Valentine's day. This tradition has been handed down from the very earliest institution of the Roman Lupercalia which St. Valentine's day replaced. Shakespeare alludes to this belief when he makes Theseus say in "A Midsummer Night's Dream"—act iv, scene 1:

> St. Valentine is past:
> Begin these wood birds but to couple now.

Herrick has written, in his Hesperides,

> Oft have I heard both youth and virgins say,
> Birds choose their mates and couple up in May,
> But by these rights I never can divine
> When I shall mingle with my valentine.

Charles, the duke of Orleans already alluded to as a famous writer of valentines, also refers to this bird-mating in the following dainty sonnet:

> Look how, my dear, the feathered kind
> By natural instinct choose
> Their mates in May to live in love
> When each to love and cherish does.
>
> Shall only you and I declare
> To spend our days in idleness apart?
> No, let us come early to be
> Two day an age of love may give.

An old writer defines a valentine to be "Ye firste of manlynesse that a mayde shalle see on ye Sayncte Valentyne's Daye, or ye firste maydye that a man shalle see on Sayncte Valentyne's morne." A custom many centuries old and one still observed in many parts of England and Scotland gives the person thus seeing his or her valentine the right to claim him or her with a kiss, which the said valentine has no right to resist or reject, unless in honor bound to fulfill a betrothal. Aunt Mary Smith will remember his beautiful description of how Catherine Grover, "the Fair Maiden of Perth," thus claimed, on St. Valentine's morning, the valiant armorer, Henry Smith, who had saved her from dishonor by his great strength and courage on St. Valentine's eve. Shakespeare refers to this old custom when he makes poor Ophelia sing in Hamlet:

> Tomorrow is St. Valentine's day,
> All in the morning betime,
> And I a maid at your window
> To be your valentine.

In some of the rural districts of England there are observed on Valentine's day many quaint folk customs which suggest those of the Christmas season. Among these is that of children going about in merry groups from house to house singing at every door the following rhymes:

> St. Valentine, St. Valentine,
> Cut your locks as I do mine.
> One before and two behind,
> Good morrow to you, Valentine.

The good housewives at whose doors they sing reward them with bread, cheese, beer and half pence.

In our own time and country the only usage of St. Valentine's day that is retained is the sending of the printed and painted "valentines" of the stationers' shops, and even this custom, perhaps, after all more honored in the breach than the observance, seems to be fast dying out. Postmasters all over this country testify that the number of those missives passing through the mails has steadily diminished for several years past. This falling off began with the introduction of Christmas, New Year and Easter cards, the number of which transmitted by post has increased just in proportion to the diminution in valentines. The reason is obvious. A sentimental valentine, the only one for which the word is not a misnomer, can only have its proper significance when it passes between persons of opposite sex. A Christmas, New Year or Easter card, on the contrary, is universal in its applicability. It is equally appropriate and acceptable from mother to daughter, from sister to sister, from lover to sweetheart, from friend to friend. Good wishes on any of the festal occasions named, Christmas, New Year's or Easter, may very gracefully and appropriately be sent by anybody to anybody, and the popularity of those three classes of cards bids fair to finally extinguish even the last remaining American observance of the day devoted to the honor of good St. Valentine.

One of the oldest usages in connection with that occasion is the giving of gifts. In the lottery of St. Valentine's day the persons drawn as valentines are under a direct obligation to make a "valentine present" to those who have drawn them. In the days when even royalty and nobility used to participate in this drawing of valentines some of these presents were of the most expensive and magnificent character. The first valentine present received by Nell Gwynn from Charles II is said to have been a necklace of divin nuts and pearls valued at £5000, while Sir Walter Raleigh on one occasion appeared at court wearing £30,000 worth of diamonds and other jewels consisting largely of valentine gifts from Queen Elizabeth and other lady admirers.

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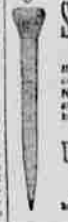

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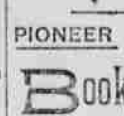

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