

The Oldest Valentines in Existence

by
**WALDON
FAWCETT**



ONE OF THE EARLY VALENTINES

NO CLASS of antiques is of greater rarity to-day than the valentines of yesteryear. Nor is this strange, for filmy creations of lace paper and scribbled pictures could scarcely be expected to stand the wear and tear of a century or more and survive, as does old furniture or pewter or brass. Possibly because old valentines are so comparatively few in number and so hard to find, only a very limited number of persons have ever attempted to gather collections of ancient valentines as a fad or a pastime. A recent canvass of the leading museums and libraries in the United States disclosed the fact that none of them possess so much as a single specimen of the valentine of our great-grandmothers' period, although the British museum in London boasts the ownership of a number of early valentines.

The one notable collection of old valentines in America, and indeed the most notable private or public collection of the kind in the world, is the property of Mr. Frank House Baer, a well-known resident of the state of Ohio and a prominent railroad official. Mr. Baer, who has had the means to indulge his unique fad, inaugurated his hunt for valentines some years ago and has covered all quarters of the globe in his search. This premier valentine collector now has more than 2,000 specimens in his old art gallery and many of his prizes have cost him a pretty penny.

Antedating all forms of manufactured valentines were the "valentine writers"—books of specially prepared verses and sentiments designed for the use of swains and maidens of a century and a half ago, who must needs prepare their own valentines. These first aids to the sentimentally inclined that have been preserved in the Baer collection have such suggestive titles as: "The Bower of Cupid," "The School of Love," "The Ladies' Polite Valentine Writer," "The Satirical Valentine Writer," and "Rhapsodies for Gentlemen Who Wish to Address Ladies in Sonnets."

The oldest and most valuable valentines in existence—those in the Baer collection are believed to be the only ones of the kind extant—are the cut paper valentines. These are carefully folded and delicately cut with saw-tooth edges, the average love token of this kind being so arranged that its unfolding discloses a continuous succession of panned sentiments. One of these cut paper valentines, bearing the date 1790, is formed from a sheet of paper about the size of a lady's handkerchief, folded into squares of about four inches. It was originally sealed with the representation of a heart. Particularly quaint conceits in the line of old-time valentines found in this collection are those which represent in each instance either a single flower or a cluster of gay posies, fashioned from tissue paper somewhat on the order of modern artificial flowers. However, these ancient counterfeit blooms were so slitted into lattice-like meshes that the pulling of an attached thread will cause each flower to unfold, disclosing sentimental mes-



OLD-TIME VALENTINE

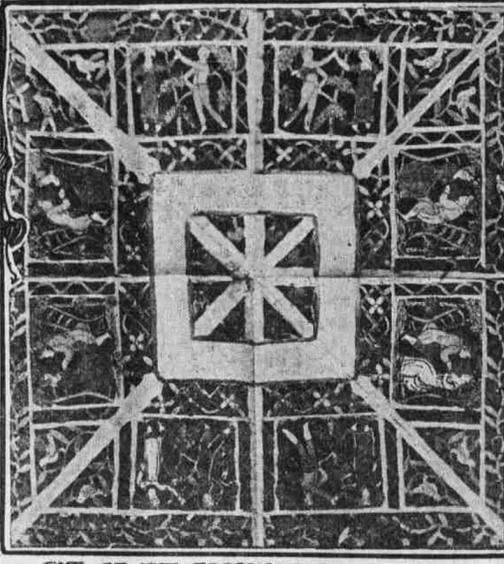
sages hidden in its depths. Transformation pictures consisting of crude drawings in ink or at best a more or less artistic rendering in water color, preceded by many years the transformation valentines that were introduced by the Germans, once the manufactured valentine became an established institution. In these old valentines of the "before and after" order a favorite subject was that of a bachelor sitting disconsolate and alone in his cheerless home. Upon lifting a flap of cardboard there was disclosed by way of contrast the happiness and contentment that might be his in a home presided over by a devoted wife.

One of the valentines of this class in the Baer collection seems at first glance nothing more than a commonplace representation of the exterior of a church, but a shifting of the scene displays the interior of the church with the bride and groom, best man, maid of honor and other attendants. The best part of the scheme is that the young lady—her name was Flora—who sent this keepsake a century ago went to the trouble to duly label each person represented in the entrancing scene, so that the recipient presumably had advance information as to all the details of his own wedding.

Some idea of the extent to which the custom of exchanging valentines was carried is indicated by the great number of different designs shown in the Baer collection above mentioned. At first hand seems to have gone rapidly into decay and the last of the "valentine writers" bears date of the year mentioned. Following this the manufactured valentines increased rapidly in cost and pretensions. From the lace paper confections, which were a gradual evolution—and which, by the way, have remained perennially popular until the present time—the development turned to the production of silk and satin valentines beautifully ornamented in water color. A glance through the art gallery of old valentines gives a clear and accurate idea of the various changes



NEW STYLE VALENTINES
CUPID
PLAQUES



ONE OF THE ORIGINAL CUT
PAPER VALENTINES

which have taken place in fashions during the past century and a half as pertaining to the costumes of both men and women. The distinctive styles of the periods of 1830 and the civil war are shown, as well as the earlier epochs. Especially significant in this regard is an old valentine bearing date of 1805, in which a sailor lad is shown bidding a sad farewell to his sweetheart. The costume of the tar is interesting as exemplifying the fashions worn by naval seamen early in the history of the republic.

Which Valentines Are Comic?

We read a lot of vigorous censure of "comic" valentines. But why, in the name of pigment, doesn't some arise in meeting and tell which is the "comic" kind? It is generally understood that the hideous distortions of form and feature, accompanied by insulting and semi-obscene doggerel, are called comic. But that sort of thing isn't comic at all. Those are the saddest creations possible—rankly and flagrantly and intentionally dis-



A VALENTINE OF
THE PERIOD OF 1850

gusting. Surely the truly comic valentine is the kind which exhibits a lot of absolutely meaningless combinations of color and shape and fill-gree and gingerbread and which carries it all off with a conscious air of being just too beautiful for anything. Who except a maker of valentines for the trade ever sat down and imagined a four-arched heart with silk and celluloid blisters on it, arranged tastefully about a fidgetless cardboard cupid sitting on the back of an accordion-plated tissue-paper swan, which he was guiding across a tinsel desert by means of a ribbon snaffle bit? Eh? I wonder what they irritate their designers with before they hand 'em the scissors and paint pot and glue bottle and turn 'em loose for that sort of thing?

Then these blood-red pansies a foot across, with more celluloid reversers on 'em, turned back from a nice empty spot over which is pasted, with a hinge, a lot of paper insertion of the kind they have in the edges of cigar boxes! And when you lift up the cigar-box paper (cut in designs like those mother used to cut in the shell paper) you read underneath, in old English type:

I think it would be mighty fine
If you would be my valentine.

Isn't that deep and original and thrilling?

The lapels of celluloid—what would the valentine perpetrators do without celluloid?—are fastened back at the points, each with a little string of tinsel arranged in a loop, while on the bend of the lapel is painted a sky-blue rose with pink leaves— isn't it artistic? And you've seen those that are just a row of pendants, all busily pending from a twisted and tasseled silk cord, haven't you? Great! On the top card, which is shaped like a scalloped pancake, is painted a beautiful little girl with the scarlet dab that had been meant for her lips striking her on the end of the nose or on the chin and with golden hair that has blue highlights.

On the next pendant (which is square and hangs about two inches below the other) is a picture of an Oklahoma landscape with the pyramids of Egypt and a Dutch windmill in the distance.

The one just below is a cut-out figure of Queen Maria Teresa or the Venus de Milo or Katherine de Milo or Mrs. Maybrick or some early Christian martyr.

Still below hangs a two-inch heart of red, with cupid on it, and below that continues a string of lesser ones. So, when it gets right down to cases, and to the kind of evidence that would be accepted in a competent court of law where nobody was corrupted, which are the comic valentines?

Don't all speak at once.—Strickland W. Gillilan.

reach the proper destination, but apparently the senders of valentines either do not know that their tokens have failed to fulfill their mission or else accept the loss philosophically. For the imaginative person there is opportunity for speculation as to how many romances have been nipped in the early stages because of the valentines that never came. Finally, one more cause of the straying of valentines in the mail is found in the numerous attempts to send such souvenirs through the mails with insufficient postage. Many little folks, for instance, seem to be under the impression that a valentine in a sealed envelope will be carried for one cent instead of two cents. If the envelope bears the address of the sender it can be returned for more postage, but, as above explained, such a clue is seldom given in the case of valentines and when the valentine is forwarded to its destination "postage due" the person to whom it is addressed—perhaps suspecting its contents—often refuses to receive it and then, of necessity, it is turned over to the dead letter office.

The dead letter office, the final resting place of the unidentified valentines, is a very busy institution. Something like seven million pieces of lost mail are every year sent to this institution to be examined and its experts or "blind readers" are wonderfully skillful in deciphering the true meaning of incorrect and misspelled inscriptions that would prove absolutely baffling to an ordinary individual. At the dead letter office Uncle Sam maintains perhaps the oddest museum in the world—a collection of the queer things that have been found in the mails. Much money is found in the letters that go astray. It totals as much as \$50,000 a year in coin and currency, to say nothing of an aggregate of about a million dollars a year in checks, drafts and currency.

BETTER LATE THAN EARLY

Here is Case Where the Sage Old Proverb Might with Profit Have Been Reversed.

There is a certain young Broad street broker whose recent sad experience in endeavoring to pull the wool over his wife's eyes has led him to declare "never again."

Now, it is the broker's custom to take a 5:30 suburban train, thus enabling him to reach his home in Westchester in ample time for the early dinner that both he and his wife like. The other day he fell. Meeting an old college mate he yielded to the latter's entreaties for an evening in town. The next stop was, of course, to telegraph the wife, which he did in these terms: "Unavoidably detained. Missed the 5:30. Home later."

When hubby finally did show up, he observed an expression on the countenance of his spouse that argued failure of his little fib.

"What's the trouble, dear?" he asked, with an affected nonchalance. Without a word the wife handed him the telegraph slip, indicating with her forefinger the words:

"Received at 4:45.—Lippincott's Magazine."

Resinol Ointment Cured When Nothing Else Would. I have had a breaking out on my neck every summer with something like Eczema, and nothing ever cured it until I used Resinol.

Barbara Carpenter, Ogden, S. C.

All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.—Christian.

Tell the Dealer you want a Lewis' Single Buller cigar for his rich, mellow quality.

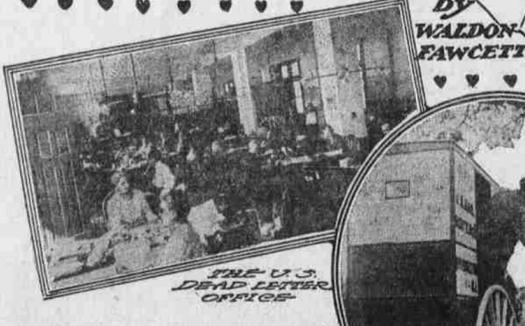
Even an old hen may appreciate a toothsome dainty.

OF ALL the different and distinct classes of mail that pass through Uncle Sam's postal channels in the course of the year, it is probable that none show so large a proportion of loss en route as do the valentines. That so many valentines go astray is, however, due almost entirely to the negligence of the senders rather than to any inefficiency on the part of the postal authorities. Nevertheless, when one pauses to consider the characteristics of the extra mail that floods the postal routes in mid-February it does not seem so strange that a larger share of it misses its destination than would be the case with an equal volume of holiday mail at other seasons of the year.

The most common cause of failure on the part of the postoffice officials to deliver mail is found in the presence on the puzzling pieces of mail matter of illegible, incorrect or insufficient addresses. Such faulty mail matter is numerous enough at all seasons of the year and it is easy to understand that it reaches flood tide along about Valentine day. In the first place many of the persons who send valentines wish to use every precaution to conceal from the recipient the origin of the remembrance. To that end they attempt to disguise their handwriting and resort to other expedients, all of which make for illegible addresses. At valentine time, too, many little folks patronize the mails on their own initiative and some of these youngsters are far from skilled in penmanship.

To this same influence—the contributions of the juvenile portion of the community—is to be attributed the unusual proportion of incorrectly and inadequately addressed pieces of mail

The VALENTINES THAT GO ASTRAY



that accumulate in all of our post-offices at the valentine festival. In innumerable instances youngsters send valentines—particularly the comic variety—to persons whose initials they do not know and regarding even the spelling of whose names they are in ignorance. Similarly there is often a woeful lack of detail in the addresses embodied in these hasty inscriptions. All these irregularities make for difficulty in the instant of the baffling products of the instinct of mischief the letter carriers or local postoffice officials are able to decipher and deliver to their proper destinations, but many of these mysterious souvenirs must needs be sent to the



COLLECTING VALENTINE MAIL BY MEANS OF RUCOR CYCLE

dead letter office at Washington—the ultimate destination of all the waifs of the mails. Even in this final clearing house for lost letters, the unique characteristics of the valentine day mail prove a handicap in its disposition. Articles sent through the mail at other seasons of the year usually contain some indication as to the identity of the sender if such information has not been given on the outside wrapper. Thus when the wandering parcel finally reaches the dead letter office and is opened there, there is every chance if its proper destination cannot be determined, at least the identity of the sender can be learned and the postal orphan sent back for better addressing. No such clues are to be expected, however, in the valentine day mail. Either the identity of the sender is kept a profound secret or is indicated only by tiny initials, which are of no possible benefit in tracing the origin of the missive. Consequently there is nothing for the dead letter officials to do but to either destroy these detritus of the valentine day mails, or, if they be deemed of sufficient value, to set them aside to be disposed of at the annual auction sale at which Uncle Sam sells to the highest bidder all the unclaimed articles found in the mails.

Incidentally it may be noted that it is very seldom that any person ever writes to the postoffice department to inquire regarding valentines that have gone astray. Many people make inquiries from time to time with reference to packages which have failed to

BOTH FRIEND AND SERVANT

Faithful Companion of Meredith, Great English Author, in a Reminiscent Mood.

In a flower-decked cottage in the village of West Humble lives the man who for 20 years was the faithful servant and devoted friend of Meredith. A mile away at the foot of Box Hill is the house in which the poet and novelist lived for a large part of

his placid beautiful life. Frank Cole was much more than Meredith's gardener; he was his body servant and general handy man, and in the poet's later years took him for his daily squire. First Mr. Cole supported his master with his arm, then came a batchelor period and finally a donkey chase. He also accompanied "the master" on the latter's infrequent journeys. They always traveled third-

class and Meredith did not like the accommodation.

"Why don't you go first, sir, and let me go third?" the servant asked.

"No," said Meredith, "I'd rather have your company than travel first-class alone."

"Sometimes," Mr. Cole said, "when I worked for him first, he would write all day or nothing. He never seemed to care about his own comfort. He used to sleep at first all the year round in the little chalet near his house, and he would get out of bed every morn-

ing to let me in until I suggested that he would save himself from catching cold, if he gave me a key. His only luxuries were good wine and good cigars, and he was a splendid judge of both. Every now and then he would have a bit of luck and get hold of some extra precious wine, and this always delighted him."—London Correspondence of Denver Republican.

First American Paper Money. The first American paper money was made in 1740.

The Cows of Muscat

Muscat is famed as the hotbed of smugglers in the Persian gulf, the snarling desert tribes being regularly supplied with arms despite the efforts of the British patrol. But to the writer, reared on a Missouri farm, the odd antics of the cows of Muscat seemed nothing short of freakish. They actually ate fish. No grass grows, so the wily Arab teaches his family cow to subsist on dates and dried fish. The milk tastes queer to

a foreigner, which is probably why the Arab likes it. He also claims it is richer and makes more butter, but most ridiculous of all is the deception practiced on cows when the calves are "weaned." A calfkin, or sometimes a goatkin, is stuffed with rags and tied not far from where the mother cow is anchored. This effigy of her late amented offspring soothes her nerves and keeps her from "going dry," according to Arabic tradition.

Muscat is famed as the hotbed of smugglers in the Persian gulf, the snarling desert tribes being regularly supplied with arms despite the efforts of the British patrol. But to the writer, reared on a Missouri farm, the odd antics of the cows of Muscat seemed nothing short of freakish. They actually ate fish. No grass grows, so the wily Arab teaches his family cow to subsist on dates and dried fish. The milk tastes queer to

a foreigner, which is probably why the Arab likes it. He also claims it is richer and makes more butter, but most ridiculous of all is the deception practiced on cows when the calves are "weaned." A calfkin, or sometimes a goatkin, is stuffed with rags and tied not far from where the mother cow is anchored. This effigy of her late amented offspring soothes her nerves and keeps her from "going dry," according to Arabic tradition.

Muscat is famed as the hotbed of smugglers in the Persian gulf, the snarling desert tribes being regularly supplied with arms despite the efforts of the British patrol. But to the writer, reared on a Missouri farm, the odd antics of the cows of Muscat seemed nothing short of freakish. They actually ate fish. No grass grows, so the wily Arab teaches his family cow to subsist on dates and dried fish. The milk tastes queer to