

CEPHAS THOUGHT VALENTINE

The Proper Thing to Express His Pent-Up Feelings,

But Telatha Got It and Cephas Instead of Widow Payne Who Wore Her Dress in a Train.

Telatha was skimming the milk. It was the hour for skimming milk in Eden—that was the name of the town—and as Telatha, in the capacity of hired help, took care of Dea Wright's dairy, you were always sure of finding her among the milkpans at that hour. Cephas Wheeler was surer of it as he came plodding up the lane, lifting his feet and setting them down with quite unnecessary force.

"There's sunthin' on his mind," murmured Telatha, tranquilly watching him. "There allus is. It's lucky 'tain't never anything very heavy, or 'twould break down. His mind wa'n't built to carry much of a heft. I make no doubt he's comin' to ask me whether or no he'd better speak up to the widder Payne. La, what a fool a man is!" and Telatha went composedly back to her skimming.

There had been a time when Cephas Wheeler had asked Telatha the question he was evidently intending to put to the Widow Payne. But that was ten years ago, and Telatha could not at that time leave her father, who was falling from day to day. So nothing had come of it, except that Cephas appeared to deduce the conclusion that since Telatha had refused him herself, she was bound to provide for him in some other way, to which end he had brought all his affairs to her for adjustment these many years. These affairs were mostly of the sentimental sort, for Cephas was continually "getting his eyes," as he expressed it, on some particular charmer of Eden town. But somehow they all proved unsatisfactory on a closer acquaintance, though more than one had shown decided favor to the village beau, who owned two farms and a house at the Cross Roads.

This last affair, however, promised to be more serious. The Widow Payne was 25 and a beauty, and she had money in the bank. "Look here, Telathy," began Cephas, bursting in among the milk-

pans and planting himself on a stool behind the churn: "I'm goin' to send a valentine."

"I wanter know. Take the end of your comforter out o' the buttermilk, Cephas," mildly admonished Telatha, the unmoved; "and don't glare like that; you'll sour the cream."

"Telathy, this is a serious business," protested Cephas, looking as if he were going to be hanged; "an' I want some serious advice. This ain't goin' to be a common valentine. Now, Telathy, if you wanted to send a woman a valentine that would put it into her mind that you was ready to offer her your heart and hand, what kind of a one would it be?"

"You don't need to put it into her mind; it's there a'ready," returned Telatha literally. "You know what to say to her better'n I do, Cephas."

"I tell ye a valentine is the proper beginnin' this time o' year," insisted Cephas, irritably. "The only question is, what form of a valentine, Telathy, should you—" Cephas leaned forward with his hands on his knees and his voice dropped to a ghostly whisper—"should you send one in the form of poetry?"

"Poetry is some like peppercass," mused Telatha; "good in its place. No, at a funeral—"

"Who's talkin' o' funerals?" put in Cephas, testily. "Listen, now, Telathy, I'm goin' to read you some poetry."

He rose, and standing behind the churn, unfolded a sheet of foolscap.

"The name on't," he announced, "is 'The Sword of St. Valentine.'"

Telatha nodded and laid down her skimmer to listen. Cephas began declaiming with a vigor that made the milkpans vibrate. It was a rhymed outburst of devotion, fervent, but mercifully brief.

"I made it myself," said Cephas, modestly, when he had finished.

"So I should judge," returned Telatha, serenely resuming her skimming.

"Mebbe you don't understand it," said Cephas, loftily. "The teller, you see, goes and sings a song under her winder to tell her his heart's broke."

"If 'twas I don't believe he'd make all that noise about it," observed Telatha, beginning on another pan. "When folks' hearts break they don't go off with a bang and hit the bystanders, Cephas."

Cephas was struck by the acuteness of this criticism. He looked a little blank.

"Wal, darn it all, Telathy, she's got to have a valentine!" he protested,

"and paper ones with flowers on 'em hain't to my notion. There's nothing original about 'em."

"Then buy her something nice," said Telatha, soothingly. "She'll understand that, if it ain't poetry."

"I would if I only knew what," said Cephas, despondingly.

Then he brightened up at a sudden thought.

"Why, I'll buy it and bring it round here tomorrow, so's 't you can help me make up my mind, he said. "It won't have to be sent fore tomorrow night."

And, looking mightily relieved at this solution of the difficulty, Cephas departed.

The next day, Telatha, taking her pans down from the shelves at the usual hour, spied Cephas coming up the lane. He was floundering through the deep snow, much incumbered with parcels of all sorts and sizes. Telatha looked at him in some surprise as he came in and dumped the bundles in a heap on the floor. There was an air of determination about him that was rather new.

"Now, look here, Telathy," he began, opening up one of the bundles, "how'd you think this would do?"

He held up a plaster of paris shepherd, with startlingly blue eyes and a mouth that either by intention or a chance stroke of a maker was in the shape of a letter O. He was embracing the shoulders of a chilly-looking shepherdess who stood gazing into space with the untroubled calmness of Telatha herself.

"Ain't it a good hint?" said Cephas romantically.

"Land sakes, Cephas," returned the unimpressible lady of the milkpans, "what's the use of hint done out in earthenware? You'd better up and tell her all about it. You'd oughter be able to perpose as well as a graven image."

"Wal, look here then, will this suit?" said Cephas, undoing another parcel with the same air of determination.

"Wax flowers," murmured Telatha. "La, they're party and no mistake, Cephas, and—"

"Wal, I can't help it. I didn't make 'em," snapped Cephas. "Here—look at that," displaying a red and green pincushion shaped like a heart and profusely decorated with glass beads that might have been intended to represent teardrops.

"Don't know's it's best to give a woman a hint that she can stick pins in yer heart," he said gloomily.

"Slong 's it's only stuffed with

bran it don't make any pertickler difference," rejoined Telatha. "But I guess she's got pincushions enough, Cephas."

He opened the last and largest parcel and flung the folds of a shimmering silk across Telatha's shoulder.

"Take care, Cephas, it'll be into the cream pail," warned Telatha; but her eyes were shining with admiration of the beautiful fabric. Silk dresses were rare in Eden.

"Wal, will that do?" demanded Cephas.

"I should think so," replied Telatha, cautiously, "but I don't know much about her tastes and notions. She's terrible stylish, Cephas."

"She ain't no sich thing," replied Cephas, "but she's goin' to be."

Telatha thought of the Widow Payne's last hat, and opened her mouth to argue the matter. But Cephas came out from behind the churn with startling suddenness.

"You're mighty hard to suit, Telathy," he said grimly. "If you won't have any of the things, will you have me?"

He drew himself up superbly.

Telatha was lifting her last pan from the shelf. She looked across it at Cephas.

"Do you mean will I have you if the Widder Payne won't?"

"Hang it, no!" shouted Cephas. "You hair't goin' to marry me to the Widder Payne, unless I'm a mind to, air ye? It's you I'm askin'. Will you, Telatha Allen, have me, Cephas Wheeler?"

"La, yes, Cephas," returned Telatha, beginning to skim the pan, "if you're sure it's me you want."

Cephas came around the table.

"Put down that skimmer, Telathy," he said. "I've got on my satinet wescut. It's ten year since I kissed you, an' then I was so ail-fired mad I didn't appreciate it as I'd oughter."

"Cephas," said Telatha, pushing him away to look at him; "you didn't mean it for me when you made up 'The Sword of St. Valentine'?"

Cephas looked abashed. "No, I didn't," he answered, truthfully. "I was layin' out to send it to the Widder Payne—like a fool. But last night I went down to her house after I left here, and there she sat in a dress that reached half across the room, an' I fell over it—then I'm blamed if her tongue didn't go all the evening like that churn dasher an' I couldn't get a word in edgeways, an' I sot an' thought of you, Telathy, skimming your milk and holding your tongue like a sensible woman, and I realized what a fool I'd

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been. I see, now Telathy, 'twas the thoughts of you that allus come between me and the rest of the women folks."

"I'm glad you didn't mean the poetry for me," Telatha said placidly, "because 'twould have been such a bad beginnin'."

"There hain't no other woman like you in the world, Telathy," exclaimed Cephas, looking at her with a burst of admiration.

"Wal, I guess I'll wash up the milkpans," said Telatha.—Springfield Republican.

An Alarming Case.

Sir William Harcourt once visited a man-of-war lying off the Hampshire coast. After dinner the weather proving rather rough, the captain, a small, dapper man, suggested that Sir William should sleep on board and surrendered his own berth for the night to the ex-chancellor of the exchequer.

Next morning the captain's sailor servant, who knew nothing of the change of berths, brought a cup of coffee to the cabin door and knocked once or twice without receiving an answer. Somewhat alarmed, he opened the cabin door and asked:

"Don't you want your coffee this morning, sir?"

The only reply was a growl, and the frightened sailor saw a gigantic figure lunge over under the bedclothes. Dropping the coffee, he rushed to the ship's surgeon, exclaiming:

"For goodness' sake, sir, come to the captain! He's speechless and swollen to ten times his natural size!"—London Tit-Bits.

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