

LOVE-PHILTERS.

The "old story" has been handed down unchanged; but the language in which it is uttered has undergone many modifications, adapting itself to the varying phases of social usage and the constraining influence of fashion. Thus, in the days of chivalry, the enamoured knight borrowed the phraseology of the tournament when he would apostrophise his mistress, and deemed no enterprise too perilous which could win her favour. The Crusader believed that "there is no love-broker in the world can more prevail in man's commendation with woman than the report of honour." And nation stood in arms against nation "for the honour of the ladies." While the Troubadour, applauding the spirit of those days, sang:

"Les chevaliers mieux en valent,
Les dames meilleures en valent,
Et plus chagement en vivent."

When religious asceticism was the rule, the love-sick swain wore the weeds of penitence; and when it was the mode for pilgrims to travel through the land, he set forth, staff in hand, to seek some knight well-read in the heart's lore, whose mature wisdom might suggest some advice to meet his case. But among all the methods by which it was deemed that the cogged might be won or retained, perhaps the most curious was the employment of love-philters, by which it was believed that the most obdurate heart could be softened.

The philter of the Greeks was, as its name implies, a love-potion; and since "all is fair in love and war," it was looked on as a recognised weapon, not only to be used but also to be guarded against. Hence arose the custom of applying counter-charms, which, when employed with the cabalistic songs prescribed for the occasion, were sure of success, unless a more powerful one of the order should counteract the spells of the officiating witch. The ingredients mingled in a love-potion were such that it may well have tasked all the gallantry of a reluctant lover to accept the proffered cup. Some of the components most in favour were the bones of toads and snakes, a portion of the forehead of a new-born foal, called "hippomane," the feathers of a night hawk, the blood of doves, bones torn from the mouth of famishing dogs, and the strands of the rope with which a man had hanged himself. Among such a heterogeneous collection of materials some must have had injurious properties. And, either in gratification of private hate, or to make good their reputation from time to time among their votaries, it was in the power of the dealers in magic to prepare a decoction which should arrest the reason or even the flow of life; such as the witch of Vesuvius prepared for Glaucus.

So great was the encouragement given to this nefarious traffic that it produced a regular profession, well skilled to evil the spotted henbane and dig the hemlock's root. From her evil preeminence, Locusta, the poisoner of Britannicus, gave her name to the trade, and taught the matrons of Rome how to distil the toxic and poisonous mushroom in their husbands' cup, so that the disordered brain might wander.

Among the Greeks, the Thessalians held the first place as magicians; and it was believed that they had power even to draw down the moon by their incantations. In Italy, the Marsians, who derived their power from the son of Circe, were deemed the most potent, and many instances are related of their skill.

We must not stray into the field of ordinary poisoning, which was so fashionable among the patrician ladies of Rome as to call for special legislation in the Lex Cornelia against all who sold, bought, or prepared noxious drugs, but confine ourselves to what may be called love-philters, i. e., potions administered, or incantations performed, for the purpose of exciting or retaining love; and under this category, it will be seen that luckless husbands, whose affections were supposed to be straying, were not exempt from danger. It is upon this that the tragic story of Dejanira is founded, who, becoming jealous of Iole, sent to her husband, Hercules, the robe steeped in the blood of Nessus, which the crafty centaur gave her, bidding her take this profit of his last passage across the river over which he was bearing her, that it might prove to her a soothing charm over the mind of Hercules, so that when he looked on any other woman he might not feel more affection for her than for his lawful wife.

Horace describes the method by which witches prepared a love-charm by burying the body of a child in the ground. The head being left exposed, food, changed three times in the day, was placed before the famishing victim; then, when life had become slowly extinct, the parched liver was removed and carefully guarded as a charm of peculiar potency. Theocritus supplies us with a recipe so accurately described that it may be worth recounting. The slighted maiden, complaining that her lover had deserted her, prepares "a poisonous brewage," with which she bids her attendant smear the threshold of his door. Having wreathed a bowl with fine purple wool, she whirled the wheel, casting meantime a handful of barley meal upon the fire that so the faithless lover's bones may waste away; whirling the wheel again, she burns a sprig of laurel, that as the crackling leaves consume, so his flesh may burn; then she moves the wheel once more; she melts wax upon the flames, that her stubborn lover may in like manner melt. How great is the faith she places in these arts we gather from her love-sick ravings. "Whom sought I not?" she exclaims. "What magic-dealing crone consulted not?" And again:

"That ohest has drugs shall make him feel my rage;
The art I learned from an Assyrian sage."

In addition to these methods for awakening a reciprocal passion, images of wax were formed, under the belief that whatever impress the plastic material received would be communicated to the person whose form it bore. And when it was desired to soften one heart and render the other obdurate, clay and wax were exposed at the same time.

In these days, when so many are engaged in sweeping clean the cobwebs which time and fancy have hung on many a cherished theory, it seems strange to reflect that the belief in this black art should have been handed down through so many generations. The slighted swain was accustomed to resort to the "wise woman" to learn what medicine would induce his "light-heeled mistress" to look kindly on his suit. And the forlorn maiden, who had cast her affections on some supercilious Adonis, repaid, with beating heart and strange sense of guilt, to the magician's cave, to obtain the mystic draught. Then, trembling, but urged on by the prize to be won, or, what was perchance of more importance in her eyes, to be torn from her rival, she would present the cup to her lover, as Nydia administered the draught to Glaucus.

If any there be who suffer from unrequited love, and are deprived of these means of obtaining it, let them take comfort

from the words of the great instructor, who, denouncing as criminal the use of those philters "which cause paleness," bids his disciples bear in mind that there is no virtue in the herbs of Medea, nor in Marsian spells mingled with magic notes, to make the flickering flame of love burn steady. Dash down the poison cup, which would substitute the raging flames of madness for the flames of Venus. Would you avoid the dreary willow, and bask still in the sunlight of your mistress's favour, "make yourself worthy to be loved, and trust not alone in beauty." Remember how the ill-favoured Ulysses, with his fluent speech, charmed poor Calypso's heart, and how she bid him tell her again and again the story of his woes, and trace with mimic art the walls of Troy upon the sand of the sea, which she implored him never again to make the trial of.

Wit never fades, but beauty is fleeting. The violets and lilies bloom not forever. And when the pink rose has fallen there remains but the thorny bush which bore it.

A REMINISCENCE OF ABBOTSFORD.

It was in the quiet of a small domestic circle, writes Miss Ferrier, I had again an opportunity of enjoying the society of Sir Walter Scott, and of witnessing, during the ten days I remained at Abbotsford, the unbroken serenity of his temper, the unflagging cheerfulness of his spirits, and the unceasing courtesy of his manners. I had been promised a quiet time, else I should not have gone, and indeed the state of the family was a sufficient guarantee against all festivities. Mrs. Lockhart was confined to bed by severe indisposition, while Mr. Lockhart was detained in London by the alarming illness of his eldest boy, and both Captain Scott and his brother were absent. The party, therefore, consisted only of Sir Walter and Miss Scott, Miss Macdonald Buchanan (who was almost one of the family), and myself. Being the only stranger, I consequently came in for a larger share of my amiable hosts' time than I should otherwise have been entitled to expect. Many a pleasant tale and amusing anecdote I might have had to relate, had I written down half of what I daily heard; but I had always an invincible repugnance of playing the reporter, and taking down people's words under their own roof. Every day Sir Walter was ready by one o'clock to accompany us either in driving or walking; often in both, and in either there was the same inexhaustible flow of legendary lore, romantic incident, apt quotations, curious or diverting story; and sometimes old ballads were recited commemorative of some of the localities through which he passed. Those who had seen him only amidst the ordinary avocations of life, or even doing the honours of his own table, could scarcely have conceived the fire and animation of his countenance at such times, when his eyes seemed literally to kindle, and even (as some one has remarked) to change their colour and become a sort of deep sapphire blue; but, perhaps from being close to him in the open air, I was more struck with this peculiarity than those whose better sight enabled them to mark his varying expressions at other times. Yet I must confess this was an enthusiasm I found as little infectious as that of his antiquarianism. On the contrary, I often wished his noble faculties had been exercised on loftier themes than those which seemed to stir his very soul.

The evenings were passed either in Mrs. Lockhart's bedroom or in chatting quietly by the fireside below, but wherever we were he was always the same kind, unostentatious, amusing, and amiable companion.

The day before I was to depart, Sir David Wilkie and his sister arrived, and the Fergusons and one or two friends were invited to meet him. Mrs. Lockhart was so desirous of meeting this old friend and distinguished person, that, though unable to put her foot to the ground, she caused herself to be dressed and carried down to the drawing room while the company were at dinner. Great was her father's surprise and delight, on his entrance, to find her seated (looking well and in high spirits) with her harp before her, ready to sing his favourite ballads. This raised his spirits above their usual quiet pitch, and towards the end of the evening, he proposed to wind up the whole by all present standing in a circle with hands joined, singing,

"Weel may we a' be!
Ill may we never see!"

Mrs. Lockhart was, of course, unable to join the festive band. Sir David Wilkie was languid and dispirited from bad health, and my feelings were not such as to enable me to join in what seemed little else than a mockery of human life; but rather than "displace the mirth," I tried, but could not long remain a passive spectator; the glee seemed forced and unnatural. It touched no sympathetic chord; it only jarred the feelings; it was the last attempt at gaiety I witnessed within the walls of Abbotsford.

FROM THE DEAD.

In a town of Northern New York a poor man went to his grave by a disease of the brain, concerning which the local medical authorities differed widely and acrimoniously. In fact, two particular physicians, who had long been professional rivals, so radically disagreed as to the exact character of the case, that when he whose treatment prevailed could not save the patient, the other did not hesitate to allege that the sick man had been destroyed by ignorant mismanagement. When a respectable practitioner casts such an imputation upon a member of his own professional school he should be pretty confident of his ability to prove it, and the accuser in the present instance was not unaware of his imperative obligation to substantiate his accusation. But how was that to be done? He had firmly maintained that the disease in question was caused by a tumour, and that the removal of the same by an operation would save the patient's life. His rival insisted that there was no tumour, and, consequently, did not perform the operation. Now, how was it to be practically demonstrated that the tumour did exist, if the patient was in his grave? There was but one way of doing that, and the doctor adopted it.

On Christmas Eve, near midnight, when lights shone brightly from homes far and at hand, and the snow lay crisply on the ground, the professional disputant whose truth and standing were at stake, as he considered in the matter, took a confidential student of his with him in a sleigh to the graveyard where had been placed the hapless subject of dispute, and rapidly and silently disinterred the poor body and placed it in the vehicle. Then whip was given to horse, and away started the sleigh on the snowy road back to the surgery.

But scarcely had the desecrators of man's last resting-place got under way with their ghastly prize, when the muffled beat of horse's hoofs somewhere in the darkness behind them told that they had been watched and were being pursued. Sharper fell the whip, and the spirited young animal before the sleigh went like the wind; yet still the pursuing hoof-beats sounded through the keen air, showing that the pursuer was well mounted. Turning from the main road into a by-way, or short cut, leading through a swampy piece of woods, the fugitives managed to gain enough distance to stop the sleigh a moment just at the edge of a plank bridge over a frozen woodland stream, and stretch a rope across the dark and narrow road. This done, they were off again for the surgery close at hand, with the gallop of the pursuer coming sharply again to their ears. Pausing once again beyond the bridge, to hear presently the collision of the coming horseman with the unseen rope, a crash, and a cry of wrath, the two men carried the body to the house and triumphantly deposited it upon a dissecting-table.

Then, thinking of nothing but his own discredited diagnosis of the disease, and the glory it would be to prove it true, the daring practitioner set to work with his instruments. Carefully shaving one side of the head, and cutting through the scalp over the spot where the principal pain had been, he bored with his trephine through the skull until a circular button of bone, about as large as a copper cent, was removed, and behold there was, indeed, the tumour! But the strangest scene of the curious drama was yet to come, and may be best described in the Doctor's own terms, as they appear in an extract from his posthumous papers lately published in the *Watertown, N. Y., Dispatch*: "With no small degree of self-satisfaction, I threw down my instruments, and was going down-stairs, when I heard a faint sigh. As I knelt by the dead man's side and, candle in hand, gazed anxiously into his pallid features, he feebly gasped and raised his eyelids. My God! Could it be a reality? Eagerly the slender thread of life was seized upon, and hour by hour, day by day, week by week, it was strengthened into a cable of perfect health."

In other words, the supposed dead man, whose disinterment has occurred but a few hours after burial, had been only insensible instead of dead, and the removal of the tumorous pressure on his brain was just in time to save his life. And another strange discovery was, that, on the same Christmas night, the doctor who had denied the tumour had broken his arm by falling from his horse! Suspecting what his rival intended, he, too, had ridden secretly to the graveyard, and was the pursuing horseman whom the concealed rope across the road so suddenly threw.

BORES.

London swarms with bores—men and women too, possessed of one idea, to which they devote their whole mind, or such part of it as business allows to spare. Sometimes the ideas get no further than matter of talk, with which people are at all opportunities bored; but more frequently they assume shape in pamphlets, copies of which are pressed on all with whom they get acquainted. I know one of these geniuses, who carries a stock of pamphlets in a leather reticule, suspended by a belt round his neck, ready for distribution whenever he happens to go. A public meeting, which has just broken up, and is in course of dispersal, gives him a splendid opportunity of emptying his wallet. The prevalent idea of these bores have in some cases a hue of plausibility, but as often they are visionary crochets. Mr. M—, artist, has a scheme for economising the sewage of London, which has gone through several transformations, and proposes to save the Thames from impurity, and redeem some millions a year at least. Mr. P—, another artist, has a new idea about perspective. Speak on any other subject, and you find him a rational man; but mention perspective, and you are in for a two hours' lecture. He would represent the pillars of a colonnade bent outwards at the middle, as necessary for rigid truth. It is of no use to tell him that the eye would be offended by it. "Your eyes must be educated to see it in the right way." He once gave a lecture, which went on very well till he broached this idea, and then the audience set off in a fit of merriment, from which he could not recover them. Mrs. A— is possessed with magnificent ideas about Australia. It takes an hour to get a mere outline of her plans. Captain M— is all for convict management by the marked system; and to hear him you would think that, if he could get his idea carried out, crime would soon be banished from the earth. Captain M— (a different man from the foregoing) has a great geographical scheme. Maps are to be made and books written giving the name of every place in the world, even sandbanks at sea, estimated to be three hundred thousand in number; the maps to be managed by having figures of reference instead of names, which, he justly remarks, sometimes extend over twenty degrees of longitude. Captain K— is full of new modes of land-tenure in Ireland. Bring these modes into operation, and everything is to go on beautifully. Mr. C— is all for sanitary regulations, and can give exact estimates as to what, in certain circumstances of aerial purification, would be the annual saving of soap to the metropolis. T—, denunciatory of horse-racing. B—, crazy about temperance. Never loses a chance of pressing upon you the value of cold water. Takes two tumblers regularly before breakfast. (Since the above was written in 1845, what immense additions to the realms of Boredom by "Spiritualism," "Evolution," "Woman's Rights," "Permissive Bills," and other speculative topics.

A NATION OF SNOBS.

If, before he sailed, Mr. Kingsley could have interviewed the young Lord Rosebery, who has just returned from the United States, after having won golden opinions from those of its inhabitants with whom he came in contact, he would have learnt that in no part of the world are ancestral titles and hereditary rank held in higher esteem. Despite the Republican propagandism of American authors and members of Congress, the citizens of the United States who swarm over Europe have a strange sympathy with what Mr. Disraeli calls "the sustained splendour of a stately life." They are great worshippers of the first and second Empires in France, of the autocrats of all the Russias, and of the proudest magnificences among our own hereditary nobility. When Mr. Charles Sumner visits us his time is chiefly spent among the ancestral homes of England, and his friends are selected from the ranks of the aristocracy. Even Mrs. Beecher Stowe, in her "Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands," reserved her choicest adulations for the late Duchess of Sutherland, for Earls and Countesses, and other members of what she calls "the titled nobility."