

A RANDOM DART.

HEY had laughed nieces.

until they were tired, Lily Mayne and Jessie and Janie Norton, Miss Estil's pretty tine's day was just had spent a morn ing hour in deciding where to send a baker's dozen of gorgeous missives.
"They are all beautifully inap-propriate," Jessie pushing

away the lot of addressed envelopes with a laughing sigh. "But this one. Who will it fit worst? I can't for my life decide! It must be sent, though. Must! That's flat. It cost a whole half dollar. It would be simply awful to let that amount of valentine go to waste.'

"I don't see why we ever bought it," Janie said, eying it critically. Lily laughed again. "Oh, we had to. It appealed so strongly to your artistic sense," she said. Then she spread out the gay sheet and waved it flaglike over her head. It showed a very pink Cupid in the act of launching a silver dart much bigger than himself, presumably at a lightly clad young person smiling down at him from

"There is something preraphaelite almost in the simplicity of it," Jessie said gravely, but with twinkling eyes. Janie made a mutinous mouth at them and began to rummage in the card basket. Lily caught her hand, saying with a comprehending nod: "I have just thought! I know what we will do.

What?" asked the others in the same breath. Lily ran through the cards in silence for a minute, then flung a handful of them into a work bag, saying:

"We will tempt fate in earnest. Put in your hand, Janie, and draw a card. Whoever it may be, he gets this valentine." "Major John Marshall Sterling," Janie read from the bit of pasteboard she had

drawn. All of them laughed more than "Poor old major! I am sure he has forgotten what a valentine looks like," Jes-

sie said, patting the pink Cupid as she

"I don't believe he ever knew. He was born old. I am sure of it," Lily answered. Janie shook her head.

"No, he wasn't," she said. "I heard Auntie Louise say the other day that he was the gayest young fellow until he went out west to fight Indians. Something dreadful must have happened there, for ever since he came back invalided he has been just as we see him now."

"He is not really so old either," Lily said; "only 50. It is that troublesom bullet in his chest which makes his hair so gray, I dare say"-

You are a destroyer of romance, Lily. You deserve to be severely suppressed,"
Jessie interrupted. "You ought to have left us the belief that it was unrequited love which had bleached his poll."

"Stop your nonsense and help me with these cards," Lily said. "Unless they are ready at once we will never get them sent in time. Valentines are good fun, but a

valentine party is ever so much better.' "Wisdom, thy name is Lily," Jessie retorted, rolling up her eyes. Then the three fell silently and furiously to work upon the envelopes piled at one side of the table, addressing them and slipping inside cards which bade all Miss Estil's friends come and be merry at her house upon Feb. 14.

Perhaps it was automatic action; perhaps, also, fate guided her fingers. Janie never knew. The fact remains that one of the fairly engraved cards went to keep the pink Cupid company upon his journey to Major Sterling. In due season the post delivered both at the major's door. The major himself took them in and blushed through all his tan and grizzle at sight of

the big envelope, which had a spray of

roses and a pair of turtledoves embossed upon the flap. "I wonder what girl is trying to guy me," he said as he sat down in his own snuggery, tossing it to the other side of the table. In reality he was full of eager curiosity to see the inside of it, but a sense of what was seemly for a man of his gray hair made him leave it ostentatiously alone until he had read through all the morning's grist of letters. He even answered one or two of the most imperative and read another page of the morning pa per before he allowed himself to touch his valentine.

"Really that is not so be bad as it might have been," he said, holding the pink Cupid at arm's length. Through living so much alone he had got into a way of talking to himself. He had few visitors. · His own man, Mulligan, was a model of discreet silence, and Ma rina, cook and housemaid, never ventured to address more than three consecutive words to "the master." Semioccasionally he spent an evening at the club. Once a year he made a round of ceremonious calls upon old friends—friends that had been his mother's rather than his own. Other-

wise he kept entirely to himself. That made talk, of course. His neighbors and their gossips could not understand why a retired officer, more than reasonably well to do outside of his half pay, should elect to live thus, more than half a hermit. What did it matter that he was a bachelor, without near ties of blood? There was Louise Estil, almost his age and single, devoting herself to many things, and especially keeping in touch with social life. The girls, Lily and Jessie and Janie, were not really her nieces, only the children of her step brothers and sisters. Yet she kept them about her half the time and gave them all sorts of pleasures. Even when they were absent she was never at a loss. All the young people, especially all the young men, adopted her

as aunt and haunted her cozy house. Major Sterling knew all this. Sometimes he smiled over it. Oftener he sighed. The smile was for the hints of doubled down pages in his past; the sigh for the intolerable loneliness more and more enveloping his present. He had a man's memories of women whom he had fancied, some hotly for the minute, some delicately afar off and wavering. He had never seriously made love to any of them, mainly that he had been too busy with doing a man's part out on the frontier. He had always meant to marry; he might even have done it long ago, only that chance



"I KNOW WHAT WE WILL DO." had such a knack of whisking him away from the enchanter of the minute and setting him where there was fighting to be

"H-m-m! This is shockingly inappropriate," he said at last, nodding to the Cupid. "The arrow is all very well—I have seen bigger ones, though I doubt if they were so dangerous. But why! Oh, why are you not shooting it at a man? You cannot be meant to personify me! I am the last fellow in the world for such a thing as that. I wonder who sent you. The lady there, up in the clouds, is not

the least bit like anybody I know." With that he took up the envelope and carefully scrutinized the address. It was written in a big hand, fashionably angular, and noncommittal. As he fingered it he felt something inside. He turned it upside down, shook it and sent the card spinning to the other edge of the table.

"I see!" he said, his eyes twinkling. "Those wicked, wicked young persons Miss Estil harbors have plotted against us, their elders and betters. They think I may be fooled into believing she had a hand in it. As if I did not know Louise Estil better than anybody in the world."

Then in mind he ran over their long acquaintance. He had been dangerously near loving her back in the old days when she was his mother's pet, and Tom, her youngest stepbrother, his own especial chum. He remembered quite clearly how it had made his heart beat to see her come tripping up the walk, and how gloomy he had been for a whole week when Tom let him know, quite incidentally and as a matter of course, that Louise was going to marry young Cary, the railroad president's son. Then he had pulled himself together and gone west, putting her so completely out of his mind that he had felt only a mild surprise at meeting Cary ten years after with a wife upon his arm as unlike Louise as possible. And it had not given him the least thrill to come back and find her free. He had listened with only languid interest when a club veteran told him how Louise had sent away her rich lover for no other reason than that she did not choose to marry him.

"You do not expect me—not the least, young ladies," he said after a little, smiling at the faces his fancy conjured up. But I shall go to your party. More, I shall claim my rights as a valentine. As I remember, if you found out what girl had sent one you were entitled to kiss her in the face of daylight. I wonder how you will like that. I wonder still more if I shall have courage to carry through so

daring an enterprise."

Man proposes. St. Valentine sometimes disposes. Major Sterling found that out beyond peradventure. The Estil house stood in the town's outskirts, sitting quite apart in the middle of wide grounds. It was gray and solid and roomy, with doors hospitably wide. He found it lighted up from top to bottom and within it as merry a company as man might care to see. It gave him an odd turn to be met by young Tom Norton, son and image of his old chum, and hustled off into the big sitting room, where 20 other men were already congregated.

"You see," Tom explained as they went along, "Janie has got this in hand. She is always up to some mischief. I tried to make her hear reason; but, you know, girls never will pay attention to what

their brothers say."
"Janie looks like a sensible girl. I am not afraid to trust her," the major returned. Tom gave a little sniff, saying: "Wait until I tell you about it. She is wild for some new valentine nonsense. In fact, all of them are. They heard about looking out of the window. As they can't manage



SENT THE CARD SPINNING TO THE OTHER END OF THE TABLE.

that they have hit on something worse. When everybody has come, I am to send you men, one at a time, into the library. They have rigged a sort of window there at the back, and the girl who will be standing behind it will, of course, see you and be your valentine for the rest of the night. They wanted to make it out the rest of the year, but I put my foot on that. The girls draw lots as to who shall first choose. It really is not a matter of choice, though; it's rather all blind luck."

"Good luck for some of us, I hope," the major said, laughing. "Do you know, Tom, it strikes me as a great scheme."

"Oh, I suppose you don't mind. Women must be all pretty well alike when one comes to your age," Tom said, a little stiffly. "But if you cared about one and saw her tagged off with another fellowwell, I think you would see the differ-

"We are ready! Bring on your sacrifices!" Janie called from outside the door. Tom had passed about small numbered slips. Now he called aloud, "Advance, No. 1, and meet your doom.'

No. 1 was Timmy Logan, the minister's son, slight, mild, blue eyed and sentimental. A silent laugh went about when at the end of a minute he was seen to pass on into the long parlors with Mrs. Beckly, 40, fat and jolly, upon his arm. 'Lord! The misfits of this night!" Tom groaned as No. 2 went in. "Don't lose your nerve or your number, major. Maybe you'll get the youngest pretty girl of all."
"I'll be satisfied with any," Major Ster-

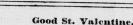
ling answered. His next neighbor said in a stage whisper, "Tom would be jolly as a grig if he could just arrange to swap with whoever gets his cousin Jessie. Again Major Sterling smiled. It was so like the Tom of old, this wanting all things to give way for the gratification of his momentary whim.

"I don't choose at all. I am No. 0," Tom said, trying to look dignified. "We are both naughts, Aunt Louise and I. That shows the naughts are sometimes

pretty significant figures.' The choosing went on rapidly. Fate was madly, merrily perverse. Nearly every couple was humorously mismatched Major Sterling found himself paired with Janie Norton, and Tom's eyes flashed hate as he saw Jessie, his Jessie, pass out, fore-doomed to the attentions of Royce Ford, his most dangerous rival. Lily fell to the lot of Mr. Ware, a widower, newly set out, and still in the first excess of widower

folly.
"Now, do you like playing providence?"
"Now, the your like playing providence?"
"The your like playing playing providence?"
"The your like playing playing providence?"
"The your like playing playing playing providence?"
"The your like playing play I hear you are responsible for all this,"
Major Sterling said in Janie's ear as they watched the throng. She gave her shoulders the least possible shrug as she replied: "I am not playing providence. I only

wish I might. "What would you do first?" he asked.
"Give all my friends just enough misery accent their happiness and my enemies happiness enough to make their misery more miserable," she answered promptly. "What an unamiable young person you



are, to be sure!" he said, with a little

laugh. "I see you have begun your work.

Tell me, please, how I came to be reckon-

protested, with, however, a suspicious red in her cheeks. Major Sterling looked

down at her and shook his head, saying

impersonally: "Of course I am not bold

time the very pattern of limpid innocence

'Still, I don't in the least see how you

"That it is happiness enough to increase

"Could you be in a better place?" Janie

could be gallant upon occasion. He drew her

hand closer within his arm as he answer-

ed: "No. I am more than pleased with

the state of life wherein I now find myself

But think of having to give it up so soon!

Don't you think a mummy that had by

chance slipped out of cerements would

find it a bit hard to think of going back

"I should not be sorry for—a mummy who need not go back," Janie said, look-

ling stopped her. He was equally bewil-

the world," he said, speaking very low.

"But do tell me! Please! So much may

depend on it. If I were like Aunt Louise

"Why, you might get married and live

happy ever after," Janie said, looking

down. "You won't tell it. She is going

to marry next month. No, it is not Mr.

died, but she would not look at him.

None of us has seen our new uncle. She

met him at the seashore. He is a genius,

delicate, five years younger than she, and

so rich he needs some one to take care of

him very badly. At first she was afraid

people would say she wanted his money.

But love found a way around pride. Real

moved away from the crewd and stood al-

"YOU KNOW IT BROUGHT ME HERE."

most alone upon the broad, lighted porch.

She put both hands over his arm and

"I think, yes! I am sure it could, if-

leaned a little to him as she answered:

than many which were carefully aimed.

A Valentine.

O'ersweeps the way by which we may return, Love will still lead, though, lost, we wait and

And if by chance of grief and sorrowing Our disjoined hands no longer clasp and cling, Some whispered word of love will find its

Let us twain keep our faith till death do part

Us, thou and I! The world's in rhyme, sweetheart;
Thy heart and mine are

Exalting us to newer peace and grace.

if you gave it a decent chance."

sand

yearn.

love always does overcome everything."

He courted her as soon as his wife

that, yet know it brought me here."

"I don't know what you mean," Janie

ed among your enemies?"

better

truth.

cold."

make out"

into them?'

ior Sterling sighed.

by the implication of it.

-what?

He Has Not Deserted His Post In the Humdrun World .- A Word About the Wide Though Varying Demands For Valentines-Immense Establishments With Capital and Costly Talent Produce Them-And They Go.

enough to assert that you do anything Every valentine season brings out a re-But there are things that you do flective essay, generally congratulatory in tone, to the effect that the custom of than-well, tampering with the sending tokens is dying out. One is led "Really, I don't know" - Janie began to conjecture who and what manner of people the gloomy essayists must be, whether too old to experience a thrill of again, then stopped, arrested by a significant motion toward his breast pocket.
"I must be your enemy," he said, still happiness or too blind to observe the life smiling. "I have evidence right herepink evidence, with a silver dart, and clouds and a lady who might easily catch of the common folks who keep the earth moving. Perhaps they are also the preachers and moralists who now and then exclaim with extended hands and wide open "What a very remarkable sort of evidence," Janie said loftily, her eyes by this eyes that marriage is getting to be a thing

of the past. It is not a far cry from valentine sending and receiving to the day of Cupid's victory and crowning. Whether valentines always mean that consummation or not my misery?" he interrupted. "You say every union of hearts and hands implies countless days sacred to Cupid's patron saint well observed in the past and an queried. She was rapidly getting over the earnest of more devotees for the same shock of finding out that the staid major shrine. The boys and girls are not going to slight or miss the privileges their elders remember too joyfully to let pass in

Then, too, there is the interchange of those tender-but not the tenderest-sentiments which Christmas, New Year's and birthday greetings do not imply, something more than mere friendship, but less than marital love because the fates will have it so; also the fun, for there is fun without a sting in it for sensible folk who ing sedulously away. Unconsciously Mamake the carnival day one of innocent merriment. Burns wrote sublimely,

"No, I suppose not," he said thoughtfully, even a little wistfully. "If only I were like your Aunt Louise"— Oh, wad some power the giftie gie us To see oursels as ithers see us. "Why! Has Tom told you about that? and why may not the power work through truth telling comic valentines? They are Auntie will never forgive him. She did not mean to tell anybody, not even the much pleasanter to take than Caudle lectures or sermons aimed at a mark. minister, until just before"— Janie began, her eyes full of wonder. Major Ster-

No, the most fashionable streets of New York, Philadelphia or Boston are dered, partly by what she had said, more not the places to study the extent of St. Valentine worship in this year 1898. "I have been told nothing. I don't There the reporter will hear from grumknow what you mean! Not the least in blers the same old story that the sales are falling off year by year. That means counted in dollars and of the gilt edged kinds. A trip along the side streets may throw a little light on the subject, but such tradesmen are often jealous and disposed to grumble over small sales while cleverly saying nothing of large ones. It's

> But behind the retailer of valentines is the manufacturer, and his establishment tells a different story whatever his lips may say. One American factory, ambitious enough to have crossed the line into Greater New York, puts out nearly 20,-000,000 valentines annually. Over 1,000 designs are laid on the forms each year, and sales of the most popular reach the 100,000 mark.

From over the ocean come stories also "I wonder if it can overcome gray hair and 30 years," the major said, with a shake in his voice. Janie shot a glance at of vast sums invested in valentine plants, with sales in average establishments of \$100,000 a year. The valentines must be him. He was deadly pale. They had up to date, and yet the profits warrant the expense of new machinery and devices to meet every fresh fad. Rice paper, plush, silk fringe and celluloid have come into play, and when a market gives out for a certain kind another is found and another until it is a back number and gives way to the next favorite. New ideas are the sine qua non of progress, and these the artists furnish as readily as for the picture market and the illustrated press. In comics the bike has held sway for years and comes up in new form each anniversary. Latterly the tandem has opened a new field for fancy, and we have not seen the last of the new woman nor of the Roentgen rays.

Today there are more than 30,000,000 American youngsters walking in the footsteps of the lovers and frolickers of the past, and they keep the day as did their elders, sighing and smiling with Cupid's patron

His Valentine. With the valentine before him, On his knee, What a precious thought came o'er him: "Sweet Marie-Did she send it? Does she love me?' How he sighed! "She's an angel far above me, But I wish her for my bride."

Then he kissed the scented letter Six months after they were married. On his knee. Cupid's random dart proved more effectual "None could ever love her better-Sweet Marie! Did she send it? Has she meant it? Should we stray, lost within a lonesome land Where flowers refuse to bloom and deathful Wish I knew!" Ah, the pity! Susie sent it,

> EARLE HOOKER EATON Valentine to a Musical Maid. In a truly awful manner You can pound the poor "pianner," You can bawl, You have had a singing master, And can sing the very plaster

Off the wall!

And he did not care for Sue!

Subscribe for the WATCHMAN.

Pitied Lovers' Woes.

The Late Rev. Dr. Houghton as the Friend of Lovers In Distress.

Dr. George H. Houghton of the Church of the Transfiguration in New York city is among the absent this St. Valentine's season. He died very suddenly last November. The kind hearted pastor of the "Little Church Around the Corner" was most widely known on account of his Christian liberality in burying from his modest but still orthodox and aristocratic church the social sinners as well as the saintly righteous. He also gained repute as a sort of a latter day St. Valentine, or a friend of lovers in despair or distress.

"It is not true that I am the St. Valentine of Greater New York and vicinity,' said the genial rector, with a smile, when spoken to about this phase of his pastoral duties; "most certainly not. I do not pose as being a saint of any kind, but I do love young people, and if my sympathy for them in their rights and wrongs entitles me to become a competitor of the good old priest who was beheaded in the days of Claudius on account of his popularity with lovers, why, then, I suppose that I may be called the modern St. Valentine.

"I marry all who come to me and want to be married. Of course I have to use a great deal of judgment in these cases and show almost the wisdom of the serpent. I put both the man and woman under oath and make them solemnly swear that they are free to marry. If they look very young, I make tolerably sure that they are of marriageable age. Then I go ahead, and sometimes I help out the marriage service with a little private prayer of my own that they may be happy together. Richard Harding Davis' Van Bibber story of the young runaways whom I married is not overdrawn. They were far from home. They were young and alone in New York.

not better married? "What do I regard as my special forte? Well, perhaps it is that of advice giving. I think I am a born peacemaker, and I know that with the grace of God I have

patched up many a home quarrel. "Once upon a time there came to me a young man carrying two letters from his ladylove. One of the letters called him her lovey and her dovey. The other was very cold and requested that their marriage be put off six months. " 'What shall I do?' asked he, with the

tears running down his cheeks. " 'Answer the lovey, dovey letter,' said I, 'and let the other go.' He did so, and in a few days they were happily married. It takes tact and management to make things go smoothly with our frail human machinery.

"Are such consultations frequent? They are. This morning at 5 o'clock I went out of town to see some people who are at sixes and sevens with each other and the world. I got home at 5 o'clock this afternoon, and before I had finished my dinner a young man-a fine young fellowcame to ask advice. And now I am as tired as four or five dogs and couldn't do any more talking even if I had a chance to do a bit of matchmaking, which I so dearly love.

"Do I want to become a love saint some day, like St. Valentine? Oh, no, indeed. I only want to be a good priest of my church. But if people want to call me the modern St. Valentine, they may do so in welcome."

Just Horrid.



Ogled a fair one to her dread. St. Valentine had marked them well, And straight to each this token sped



"In this composite valentine Thy phiz and more beside pray see I'll let thee choose the 'beaut' for thine-All mashers look alike to me."

Like Her Face. Miss Cutting Very—Yes, May, dear, the valentine Charley sent you was so like you—so like your face. Miss May D'Upp—Like my face?
"Yes, dear—hand painted, you know.

DENE OWEN