

A STORY OF SCIENCE.

A philosopher sat in his easy chair,
Looking as grave as Milton;
He wore a solemn, mysterious air,
As he Canada Balsam split on
A strip of glass, as a slide, to prepare
For a mite taken out of his Milton.

He took his microscope out of its case,
And settled the focus rightly;
The light, thrown back from the mirror's face,
Came glimmering upward brightly;
He put the slide with the mite in place,
And fixed on the cover tightly.

He turned the instrument up and down,
Till, go along a proper sight, he
Exclaimed—as he gazed with a puzzled frown—
“Good gracious!” and “Highly-tighty!”
The sight is enough to alarm the town—
A mite is a monster mighty!”

From 'tother end of the tube, the mite
Regarded our scientific;
To his naked eye, as you'll guess, the sight
Of a man was most terrific;
But reversing the microscope made him quite
The opposite of magnific.

“One sees the truth through this tube so tall,”
Said the mite, as he squinted through it;
“Man is not so wondrously big after all,
If the mite world only knew it!”

MORAL.

Men.—Whether a thing is large or small,
Depends on the way you view it!

BRITANICUS'S VALENTINE.

AN HISTORICAL STORY OF THE FOURTEENTH OF FEBRUARY.

Britanicus was a little, olive-skinned Italian boy, who lived in Rome about 1,800 years ago. Rome was at that time the capital of the civilized world, and in the splendid imperial palace on the palatine, surrounded by all the emblems of the most exalted sovereignty, another young boy wore the purple of the emperors. This boy was Nero. He and Britanicus were cousins, and the young prince was, at the time of which we write, the guest of the boyish emperor, living with him in the palace of the Caesars, as though they had been brothers.

Britanicus was some three years younger than the emperor, being but 14, while Nero was 17. This single fact made a great deal of difference in the respective lives of each, for, had Britanicus been the older, he would have been the emperor and Nero would have been the prince. As it was, the former would become the emperor if Nero died. But that event was not expected to occur very soon, nor did Britanicus wish it to. He had no wish to be compelled to wear the heavy, embroidered purple mantle, a symbol of the imperial rank, and be waited upon by those stern, dark-bearded men, who came every day to see his cousin, and talk about sober state affairs, when he wanted to ride in his new chariot, or go to see the gladiators fight in the amphitheater. No, Britanicus thought it was hard enough to be a prince, without being anything else.

Both of these boys were orphans. The father of Britanicus had been a brave general, who won many victories for Rome at the head of his legions. But he had died in the midst of his glory, leaving his young son motherless. Nero's father had been a soldier, too, but when he died his widow married the Emperor Claudius, and she was still alive. She was a stately, haughty looking woman, with dark, shining hair, and fierce, black eyes that seemed to look right through any one. Secretly, Britanicus did not just like his aunt, and stood a little in fear of her sharp eyes and scowling brow.

Children's plays are generally taken from what is most familiar to them. In most countries these are formed upon trifling subjects, but the young Romans acted trials in the courts of justice, the command of armies, triumphal processions and the state of emperors. They

also had a very dignified game, called the play of Troy, which was a sort of tournament, celebrated by companies of boys, who used arms suitable to their strength.

Some of you may think, perhaps, that a Roman boy did not have a very joyous time of it, but you will see your error when you learn how many holidays he had. First, there were all the military and imperial shows, occupying weeks sometimes, and characterized by chariot races and gladiatorial combats, in which the Romans so much delighted. Then came the religious festivals, in which there were magnificent processions to the temples, and costly sacrifices made to their heathen gods. One of these festival days occurred on the 14th day of February. We are accustomed to designate the day as St. Valentine's Day, but the old Romans called it the day of the Luperci. The festival itself was called the Lupercalia, and was distinguished by all kinds of amusements and indulgences.

Among the ceremonies was one of placing the names of girls and young women in a box, from which they were taken, according as chance directed. This incurred the necessity of bestowing a gift upon the owner of the name each one drew, and if the fair one reciprocated by another one, or by a written message, he was to consider himself her valentine, as modern usage terms it. This custom, through various changes, has descended to our own times, and when you receive your valentine you will remember that the Roman youth and children honored the same festival in very nearly the same manner. The name of valentine is derived from a Christian saint, who lived in Rome about 200 years after Britanicus, and whose festival the early fathers of the church confounded with that of the ancient Lupercalia.

Britanicus stood one morning in the marble atrium or courtyard of the palace, looking out upon the street. His fine boyish figure was clothed after the fashion of a princely Roman lad. His olive-colored legs were bare, and his head, with its long, dark hair, had no covering. But the tunic of full, rich silk, belted at the waist and descending to his knees, and the cloak or stola, with its purple border and its heavy embroidery and clasps of gold, were all in the newest style, and showed his graceful person to advantage.

It was the 14th day of February, the Roman Lupercalia, and Britanicus had already been to the forum and drawn a name from the holy urn. He now held it in his hand, a dainty tablet, with the name of Octavia Julia in Roman characters upon it. A girl by that name was not unknown to him, being no less than a fair cousin of whom he was very fond, and with whom he had romped more than once in his childhood days.

He was sagely considering what he should send her for a present, when the clash of the lictors and the shouts of the slaves, who usually followed the emperor, sounded in the courtyard, and the young prince glanced out just as Nero was dismounting from his golden chariot. Flushed with pleasure and kingly pride the boy emperor rushed gaily into the atrium. How handsome he looked in his purple toga, his embroidered buckskin and his long, silken hair, perfumed with precious unguents and sparkling with gold dust! Little resemblance was there between that happy, boyish face and the cruel, bestial Nero he afterwards became.

His quick eye fell on Britanicus. “Ha! my cousin, hast thou been to the forum and drawn thy name? Why, thou art lucky,” as he read the tablet, “Octavia is our cousin, and very lovely. I congratulate you.”

“I know not what to send her,” murmured Britanicus.

“Send her a chariot and a span of Phrygian horses, or a Grecian amphora,” suggested Nero.

“Thou knowest very well, my cousin Domitianus (one of Nero's names), that I have no gifts like those to bestow upon my friends.”

“What! the cousin of an emperor and as empty of secretures as a plebeian? Then you shall be so no longer. What I named shall be thine. A slave shall be dispatched immediately

with the span and chariot to our cousin's palace.”

“Nay; rather let me choose one of those elegant Greek vases in the cabinet,” said Britanicus.

“It shall be as you wish, cousin, but use dispatch, for I am impatient to learn how the fair Octavia will receive thy gift,” and the emperor walked away, humming a gay air that he had learned that very morning from his Corinthian dancing master.

So a black Nubian was sent with a beautiful vase of Samian workmanship, to the young princess, and Britanicus waited with ill-concealed anxiety for the message which should tell him of the fair girl's decision.

It came at last. Britanicus was dining with the emperor in the great banquet hall, amid murmur of fountains and odor of flowers. Brilliant entablatures shone on the walls. A hundred guests, reclining on couches, sat around the board, and throngs of slaves waited the nod of all. The young prince had just quaffed a goblet of sparkling Falernian, when the Nubian placed the expective missive in his hands. With a bright flush on his boyish countenance he eagerly perused its contents. A delicate waxen tablet with a lordly monogram, and the engraving of a Venus in a car drawn by pigeons, and underneath, a few well-chosen words, signifying her acceptance of his princely gift and proffered courtesies—that was all, but it gave joy to Britanicus. As he slipped the tablet under his tunic, he caught the stern glance of his aunt.

“What have you there, Britanicus?” she asked, reaching her hand forward, and an obedient slave carried the boy's gift to the fierce-eyed queen. She read it with a frown, and retaining it, she called Nero to her and they left the room together.

What could it all mean? Britanicus wondered what he had done to make his aunt scowl so savagely, and he felt a little indignant at her treatment of him. He could eat no more, and rising, he threw the garland from his head and walked out into the atrium.

There Nero met him half an hour later. Without any appearance of change in his manner, the emperor told him that Octavia would be at the palace that night with other company, and that the evening would be spent in pleasure.

Britanicus hardly knew how to wait for the night-coming. He anointed his hair and put on new robes, and when the guests had arrived, made his appearance, as gay and happy a boy as one could wish to see.

What a merry company it was. The old palace was bright with light, music sounded, and the laughing voices of the children made a pleasant chorus on the evening air. Games were indulged in, and in one which was called “Who shall be king?” there promised to be much excitement. Nero had been chosen by lot for the king, and the interest of the game depended upon the ingenuity of the monarch in commanding such things to be done, by his various subjects, as would most amuse the company. When it came the turn of Britanicus to receive orders, Nero directed him to go into the middle of the room and sing a song.

Although this was a severe requirement for one so young, the boy, without any hesitation, stepped forward and began to sing. His theme was about a young prince who loved a beautiful girl, and how a fierce old witch kept him in a dreary palace, away from the light of day, and would never let him see his love. The entire assembly listened with profound attention, charmed by the artless simplicity of his song and the grace and beauty of the boy. There was a hush when he closed. He saw Octavia's cheek burning with blushes, and beyond her he saw the dark face of his aunt Agrippina, regarding him with a glance that made him shiver.

When the festivities were over his aunt approached him, and placed the tablet in his hands that he had received from Octavia.

“Doubtless you would not like to lose it,” she said to him, her fiery eyes gleaming on him like a burning flame, “therefore keep it, and may thy cousin never regret her gift,” and then