

APRIL.—ANGLING.



A fool! a col!—I met a col! 't the forest.  
 A motley fool! a miserable world!  
 As I do live by food, I met a fool.  
 "Good morrow, fool," quoth I.—SHAKESPEARE.

WHAT merry "quirks and cranks" have we seen played on April-fool Day! What gushes of laughter have rung out, as one after another was beguiled by this harmless foolery! Who ever forgot the old shoemaker's shop by the roadside, where we sent some witting for a pennyworth of stirrup-oil, and who invariably got thrashed by the old cobbler's stirrup-leather? At any hour we can picture the sheepish look of the boy—see him holding out his saucer, while a twinkling of merriment gathered about the wrinkled corners of the old man's grey eyes, as he unloosed the strap from his foot and knee; and, although the hardest blow he struck would scarcely have killed a fly, yet what roars of hearty laughter we sent forth as we saw the little simpleton scamper off, and beheld the merry shoemaker shaking his strap as he stood at his shop-door, in the sunshine of an April morning. Then there was pigeon-milk to be sent for at the milk-house; and here, perhaps, the tables were turned upon us, for the youth we sent, although he pretended ignorance, took the mug and the penny, and going in at once, asked for a halfpennyworth of milk, put the other halfpenny in his pocket, then came out boldly, and said, "Here it is;" while we looked at each other, and confessed that he had made April fools of us. Then what shoes we said were untied—handkerchiefs dropped—hats crushed—black spots on the face,

which we sent them to the glass to look at—where they only got laughed at for their pains.

Wicked and not always harmless errands did we also send others upon. Mr. Somebody wanted to borrow the large brewing tub, and the lender went toiling with it in a barrow: the load was almost more than he could wheel; and when he arrived at his journey's end, the pretended borrower only called him an April fool. He had his joke, and we our laugh; but never again had he the loan of the brewing tub. We sent the doctor post-haste to some one who was hearty and well, and probably busied in his garden. We had the fire-engine brought a mile or two; then laughed at the old man as we pointed out the leaden pump for him to play upon. Pigs had fallen into imaginary wells; horses and donkeys we pounded, then laughed at the owners, who never for a moment thought of looking into their own fields or stables until they returned. Yet very rarely did these tricks provoke any anger; all was considered fair on April-fool Day, for every one was disposed to be merry; and very often the laugh was as loud on the part of the deceived as the deceivers, and small sympathy did he obtain who lost his temper on the first of April.

Even grave sober matrons unbent their staid brows at our jokes; they recalled



the days when they also were young, and had their jokes—when they got their lovers to hunt for a needle they had never dropped, or to stoop for a cotton-ball which was safely deposited in their laps. Such tricks seem to sit lightly, even on the conscience of old age; they bring no regrets. Though we have known a swain sent ten miles to see his sweetheart, by an urgent letter, yet the laugh they enjoyed together seemed, somehow, to sweeten the long and unnecessary journey. April-fool Day was a merry time with our forefathers, who appear never to have lost a chance of making themselves happy whenever they could.

Spring-time stirred the blood of the great father of English poetry, Chaucer. He could not lie in bed when the daisies were opening. He tells us that he then found no delight in his books; that when he heard the birds sing, and saw the flowers beginning to blow, he bade farewell to his study; that he loved the daisies above all the flowers that grew; that scarcely a morning dawned in spring but what he rose early. As he himself says:—

—I am up and walking in the mead,  
To see this flower against the sun spread.  
When it upriseth, early on the morrow,  
That blissful sight softeneth all my sorrow.  
So glad am I, when that I have presence  
Of it, to do it all reverence,  
As she that is of all flowers the flower,  
Fulfilled of all virtue and honour,  
And ever alike fair, and fresh of hue.

And ever I love it, and ever alike new,  
And ever I shall, till that mine heart die.  
There loveth no one hotter in his life,  
And when that it is eve I run blithe,  
As soon as ever the sun sinketh west,  
To see this flower how it will go to rest,  
For fear of night—so hateful she doth kneas,  
Her cheer is plainly spread in the brightness  
Of the sun—for there it will unclose.

There has been a great outcry of late amongst many good and well-meaning people against the capturing and rearing of young birds. They have pronounced it barbarous and cruel in the extreme, however kindly they may be reared. Now this is a strange contradiction. Kindness cannot be cruelly, even if misapplied. Youth of both sexes who rear up birds do their utmost generally to keep them alive; and we have no hesitation in asserting that an attendance upon the wants of these little chirrupers cultivates kind and affectionate feelings, softens the heart, and contributes towards the making of better men and women than they would otherwise have grown into, had it not have been for these necessary attentions. A girl will weep, and a kind-hearted boy be sorry, for the death of a favourite bird. And while such things help to refine the feelings, and are unaccompanied by cruelty, it is surely better that a half-fledged nestling should perish, now and then, through excess of kindness, than such virtuous emotions be stifled. We dare not put the number of young birds that are carried off, and devoured by hawks, weasels, &c., against the few that die through over-nursing; although a good argument might be twisted out of such matter.

But, whatever may be said about birds, no such charge can be brought against flowers; and as the following passage, which we wrote some years ago in praise of these "bowing adorers of the gale," has appeared in several publications without the acknowledgment of our name, we think it but justice to claim our own:—

"Who would wish to live without flowers? Where would the poet find his images of beauty, if they were to perish? Are they not the emblems of loveliness and innocence, and the living types of all that is pleasing and graceful? We compare young lips to the rose, and the white brow to the radiant lily; the winning eye is blue as the violet, and the sweet voice like a breeze kissing its way through the flowers. We hang delicate blossoms on the silken ringlets of the young bride, and strew her path with fragrant flowers as she leaves the church. We place them around the marble face of the dead in the narrow coffin, and they become emblems of our affections—of pleasures remembered and hopes faded—wishes vanished, and scenes cherished in memory, all the more, because they can never return. We look to the far-off spring in other valleys—to the eternal summer beyond the grave, where flowers that never fade bloom in those starry fields, which no chilly winter ever blew off. They come upon us in spring like the remembrance of a pleasant dream—a vision that hovered above us in sleep, peopled with shadowy beauties and simple delights, embroidered with the richest hues of fancy. Sweet flowers!—that bring back again the scenes of childhood—faces remembered in youth—the love that knew not it was love!" Even in our rooms they conjure up images of the mossy bank by the wayside, where we so often gazed upon the early primroses. They recall the sheltered glen, darkly green, filled with the perfume of violets, that showed like another sky amid the scene. The sweet song of the village maiden again rings upon our ears while we gaze on them, and we remember those modest eyes "that ever loved the ground," and the time we first beheld them—

Fix'd as a pilgrim's—wilder'd in his way,  
Who dare not stir by night, for fear to stray,  
But stands with awful eyes to watch the dawn of day.—DRYDEN.

What a mystery seems to hang about an old wood when the trees are covered with leaves, and the underwood is thick and impassable. We know not what flowers are growing in those untrodden solitudes; we cannot tell what birds build and hide in those hidden coverts; what badgers, weasels, polecats, martens, and snakes burrow, hide, climb, and bask, under ground and in the hollows of trees, about the great mossy branches, and on the unexplored banks, which accumulated leaves, and natural water-courses, and huge fallen trees have formed. It is this very difficulty of seeing beyond the few feet around us, that makes a wood so solemn. A hill or a moorland may be lonely, but there the view is open, whereas in the heart of an old wood all around us is dim shadow, green, and mysterious. Many of the trees are large and aged; and we feel that we are in the presence of strange things, that have grown old in light and darkness for centuries; that they have outlived all other living things, and around them there hangs a kind of reverential awe, such as makes us marvel not that in the early ages, when England was first peopled, they were worshipped by the Druids and their followers. Then we come upon deep dells, over which the gnarled and withered stem leans, and the foliage darkens, and we marvel how these great hollows were first formed, for nowhere do they bear a trace of the hand of man. We know that the ancient Britons kept their corn in subterranean places, which have slept undisturbed through the silence of many centuries. All traces of the work of these early excavations is buried beneath the accumulated gatherings of a thousand autumns and winters, which have cast down and rotted their leaves.

Here quivering aspens bow before the gale,  
And hawthorn's blossom hid in sunless shade;  
The mournful ring-love coos her tender tale,  
The holly's shining leaves are here display'd,  
While silver birches overhang the glade;  
The towering elm shelters the dusky rook,  
The hazel in green beauty is array'd,  
The alder hangs o'er the crisped brook  
In which the willow flowers in silence ever look.

And in such a spot the sudden starting of a large pheasant from out the deep underwood, as it goes with a loud "whur-r-r" high up amid the foliage, causes the lonely wanderer to spring back unconsciously, though he smiles the next moment at this needless alarm.

As Angling has already commenced, we shall glance at a few of the finny inhabitants of our streams and rivers; first beginning with the stickleback, with its three spines, which can either be raised or lowered at will, and which seems

fit for nothing but food for other fishes and the amusement of boys. "I know not," says quaint old Izaak Walton, "where he dwells in winter, nor what he is good for in summer." He is, however, a great ornament to a glass globe; his colours are splendid; and by a constant changing of the water every two or three days, he has lived in his glass house for two or three years. The minnow, which first appears in March, although so small, has a flavour equal to many of our more celebrated fish, especially when fried with the flowers of primroses and cowslips, and the yolks of eggs and butter—a dish delicate enough for the most imaginative of poets, though it was at one time very common. In Summer they are full of spawn, and not so good as in spring. Everybody knows that a small red worm is a sufficient bait, that three or four hooks may be used at once, and sometimes as many fish be drawn out at a time, for they always bite eagerly.

The ball-head, or miller's-thumb, with its immense head, large mouth, and spiny teeth, though anything but pleasant to look upon, forms an excellent dish, and those who have never tasted it will be agreeably surprised when they partake of one, and regret that they are not to be met with oftener at the fishmonger's. He is very fond of hiding under a stone, beside which, if a worm be dropped down gently, he will dart upon it in an instant, for he never stops to consider a moment about the matter if the hook is well concealed.—The loche we have often caught in the river Trent; it is a long fish, without either scales or teeth, bearded like a barbel. It is often used as a bait, especially for eels. Next in succession comes the gudgeon, which, though "little, is good;" it is well known to the London angler, being plentiful in the Lea river—that river of old historical associations, where English Alfred drew off the water and left the fleet of Hastings, the celebrated Sea-king, high and dry aground. It is rather a handsome-looking fish, broad in the middle, with a beautifully marked tail and back fin, and may be caught either with worm, gentle, or paste. The bait must touch the ground. It is fond of a gravelly situation. The bleak, or whiting, is a well-known fish, always on the move; is about six inches long, with large eyes, a small head, and silvery gills: the back is of a beautiful green colour. They are famous fly-catchers, and, from their rapid motions, are called water-swallows. Two or three hooks may be used, as in minnow fishing, and the same baits as for gudgeons. The flavour is very indifferent.

The dace, dart, shallow, dare, or by whatever name it is called, is a fast breeder, and during the summer months, very partial to playing about on the sunny surface of the water. It is found in many of our rivers, and appears to prefer such spots as are in constant motion, through the rolling of rapid currents and eddies. In cold weather it prefers a quiet hole, or the sheltered part of a stream overhung by the tall water-flags or tufted rushes. Its body is rather long, the back of palish green, varied with dusky marks, while the belly has a silvery appearance, and the fins a pale red tinge. It will almost take any bait in spring; neither worms, larvæ of beetles, grubs, caterpillars, or even water-snails, come amiss to it. They are sharp quick biters, requiring to be struck suddenly; and, as they are not to be drawn out without a good struggle, it is necessary to use strong tackle. Blaine makes mention of a pie made of dace and roach, which seems to have been

A dainty dish to set before a King;  
For when the pie was open the guests began to sing.

And, according to his account, they would willingly have dined off such a pie, once a week, at least, as long as they lived. Roach-fishing so nearly resembles that of dace, that we shall not pause to describe it. The beautiful gold-coloured circle of the eye and the rich red fins are familiar to those who have seen the roach in good condition; nor is it to be mistaken, on account of its great breadth when laid on its side. It affords excellent sport to the angler, and has been caught from a pound to two, or more, in weight. We pass by the rudd, a fish which has led to much discussion, some considering it a species of dace, and others of carp, and come to the bream, with its high arched back, forked tail, and large eyes. When in fine condition and a good size, the bream has a rich golden colour, in place of the silvery hue it before wore. They are a cautious race, and the angler ought not to throw his shadow upon the water, but keep himself as much out of sight as possible. A warm, cloudy day is considered the most favourable for biting, and a red worm the best of baits. He is a fish rather too fond of sucking the bait, but this can be easily detected by watching the float: for our part, we never struck in too great a hurry when we detected this half nibbling; the better plan, we think, is to let him get well hold, or go if he chooses, though it is necessary to examine the bait after his departure. We must reserve a few remarks on this old and pleasant occupation for next month.

