

ing lips—in all his face his mother's sweet fair beauty—his mother's hair, his mother's eyes.

"Are YOU my father?"

And Oliver Stafford cried:

"My God—I am!"

* * * * *

The war was over. Peace resumed her gentle reign. Brother fought brother no longer—the sounds of battle were heard no more. The Union was preserved; the slaves were free—and the contractors in various countries for the non-supply of the commissariat had all retired on their fortunes.

On the deck of a steamer bound for the old country were Oliver Stafford and his wife, little Oliver near them. As the great home of liberty and mixed drinks faded away on the rearward horizon, they spoke once again of the strange and terrible mistake through which they had been brought there. And as she referred to the secrecy of her lessons in Russian, innocent though the motive for keeping them from her husband's knowledge was, Marler said, as his arm drew her closer and closer to him, and her head sunk upon his breast as it did seven years before in the porch of the village church on Christmas Eve:

"In that, I was guilty—of aught else, guiltless!"

APRIL FOOLS.

THE 1st of April, of all days in the year, enjoys a character of its own, in as far as it, and it alone, is consecrated to practical joking. On this day it becomes the business of a vast number of people, especially the younger sort, to practise innocent impostures upon their unsuspecting neighbours, by way of making them what in France are called *poissons d'Avril*, and with us April fools. Thus a knowing boy will despatch a younger brother to see a public statue descend from its pedestal at a particular appointed hour. A crew of giggling servant-maids will get hold of some simple swain, and send him to a bookseller's shop for the *History of Eve's Grandmother*, or to a chemist's for a pennyworth of *pigeon's milk*, or to a cobbler's for a little *strap oil*, in which last case the messenger secures a hearty application of the strap to his shoulders, and is sent home in a state of bewilderment as to what the affair means. The urchins in the kennel make a sport of calling to some passing beau to look to his coat-skirts; when he either finds them with a piece of paper pinned to them or not; in either of which cases he is saluted as an April fool. A waggish young lady, aware that her dearest friend Eliza Louisa has a rather empty-headed youth dangling after her with little encouragement, will send him a billet, appointing him to call upon Eliza Louisa at a particular hour, when instead of a welcome, he finds himself treated as an intruder, and by and by discovers that he has not advanced his reputation for sagacity, or the general prospects of his suit. The great object is to catch some person off his guard, to pass off upon him, as a simple fact, something barely possible, and which has no truth in it; to impose upon him, so as to induce him to go into positions of absurdity, in the eye of a laughing circle of bystanders.

What compound is to simple addition, so is Scotch to English April fooling. In the northern part of the island they are not content to make a neighbour believe some single piece of absurdity. There, the object being, we shall say, to befool simple Andrew Thomson, Wag No. 1 sends him away with a letter to a friend two miles off, professedly asking for some useful information, or requesting a loan of some article, but in reality containing only the words:

"This is the first day of April,
Hunt the gowk another mile."

Wag No. 2, catching up the idea of his correspondent, tells Andrew, with a grave face, that it is not in his power, etc.: but if he will go with another note to such a person, he will get what is wanted. Off Andrew trudges with this second note to Wag No. 3, who treats him in the same manner; and so on he goes, till some one of the series, taking pity on him, hints the trick that has been practised upon him. A successful affair of this kind will keep rustic society in merriment for a week, during which honest Andrew Thomson hardly can show his face. The Scotch employ the term *gowk* (which is properly a cuckoo) to express a fool in general, but more especially an April fool, and among them the practice above described is called *hunting the gowk*.

Sometimes the opportunity is taken by ultra-jocular persons

to carry out some extensive hoax upon society. For example, in March, 1860, a vast multitude of people received through the post a card having the following inscription, with a seal marked by an inverted sixpence at one of the angles, thus having to superficial observation an official appearance: "Tower of London.—Admit the Bearer and Friend to view the annual Ceremony of Washing the White Lions, on *Sunday, April 1st, 1860*. Admitted only at the White Gate. It is particularly requested that no gratuities be given to the Wardens or their Assistants." The trick is said to have been highly successful. Cabs were rattling about Tower Hill all that Sunday morning, vainly endeavouring to discover the White Gate.

It is the more remarkable that any such trick should have succeeded when we reflect how identified the 1st of April has become with the idea of imposture and unreality. So much is this the case, that if one were about to be married, or to launch some new and speculative proposition or enterprise, one would hesitate to select April 1st for the purpose. On the other hand, if one had to issue a mock document of any kind with the desire of its being accepted in its proper character, he could not better insure the joke being seen than by dating it the 1st of April.

The literature of the last century, from the *Spectator* downwards, has many allusions to April fooling; no references to it in our earlier literature have as yet been pointed out. English antiquaries appear unable to trace the origin of the custom, or to say how long it has existed among us. In the Catholic Church, there was the Feast of the Ass on Twelfth Day, and various mummings about Christmas; but April fooling stands apart from these dates. There is but one plausible-looking suggestion from Mr. Pegge, to the effect that, the 25th of March being, in one respect, New Year's Day, the 1st of April was its *oetane*, and the termination of its celebrations; but this idea is not very satisfactory. There is much more importance in the fact that the Hindoos have, in their *Huli*, which terminates with the 31st of March, a precisely similar festival, during which the great aim is to send persons away with messages to ideal individuals, or individuals sure to be from home, and enjoy a laugh at their disappointment. To find the practice so widely prevalent over the earth, and with so near a coincidence of day, seems to indicate that it has had a very early origin amongst mankind.

Swift, in his *Journal to Stella*, enters under March 31, 1713, that he, Dr. Arbuthnot, and Lady Masham, had been amusing themselves that evening by contriving "a lie for to-morrow." A person named Noble had been hanged a few days before. The lie which these three laid their heads together to concoct was that Noble had come to life again in the hands of his friends, but was once more laid hold of by the sheriff, and now lay at the Black Swan in Holborn, in the custody of a messenger. "We are all," says Swift, "to send to our friends to know whether they have heard anything of it, and so we hope it will spread." Next day the learned Dean duly sent his servant to several houses to inquire among the footmen, not letting his own man into the secret. But nothing could be heard of the resuscitation of Mr. Noble; whence he concluded that "his colleagues did not contribute" as they ought to have done.

April fooling is a very-noted practice in France, and we get traces of its prevalence there at an earlier period than is the case in England. For instance, it is related that Francis, Duke of Lorraine, and his wife, being in captivity at Nantes, effected their escape in consequence of the attempt being made on the 1st of April. "Disguised as peasants, the one bearing a hod on his shoulder, the other carrying a basket of rubbish at her back, they both at an early hour of the day passed through the gates of the city. A woman, having a knowledge of their persons, ran to the guard to give notice to the sentry. 'April fool!' cried the soldier; and all the guard, to a man, shouted out, 'April fool!' beginning with the sergeant in charge of the post. The governor, to whom the story was told as a jest, conceived some suspicion, and ordered the fact to be proved; but it was too late, for in the meantime the duke and his wife were well on their way. The 1st of April saved them."

It is told that a French lady, having stolen a watch from a friend's house on the 1st of April, endeavoured, after detection, to pass off the affair as *un poisson d'Avril*, an April joke. On denying that the watch was in her possession, a messenger was sent to her apartments, where it was found upon a chimney-piece. "Yes," said the adroit thief, "I think I have made the messenger a fine *poisson d'Avril*!" Then the magistrate said she must be imprisoned till the 1st of April in the ensuing year, *comme un poisson d'Avril*.—*Chambers' Book of Days*.