

was a most diverting novelty, a joke that lasted for months. Just now there was no joke in connection with the gentleman, in fact there was scarcely any peace at Burke & Co's. except in his absence, these periods being of very short duration. He seemed to think some one would take advantage of him if he were not on the spot to attend to his own interests. He was scarcely out for dinner when he was back again, eagerly scanning every face as if to gather from it the purport of what had transpired during his absence.

The first of April came,—a day of pouring rain, howling wind and weak practical jokes, some of the latter being well remembered for years after.—a very depressing day to the Gray family, and a very irritating one to Mr. Markham. It is to be feared from the temper in which that unfortunate man made his appearance that morning, that he had been made the victim of a first of April joke. Whether that was the case or not, before many hours were over, he had fallen into many a trap, with his eyes open too; it was the general belief that they were never shut. The others shared his fate, but they received it with better grace. Pompey, the colored office boy, was busily engaged carrying notes, generally purporting to be from Mr. Burke on private business, to each one in the establishment—the most successful trick of the day. Even the eagle-eyed Mr. Markham fell into it, and Robert Gray with a very serious face,—there was little joking about him that day—after opening and reading his, quietly took his hat and went out to the office next door, only to come back and own himself “fooled.” With Mr. Markham, the “*bete noir*,” the jokes never came to an end, some of them very transparent, others the result of strong dislike and a great deal of thoughtful preparation; but by the afternoon he was on the alert and prepared to pay every one back in his own coin. With a broader grin than usual on his sable countenance and a mischievous twinkle in his eye, Pompey presented him with a letter from the office. “Wait, I’ll give you an answer,” said Mr. Markham. Taking the letter to his desk he wrote something on it with red ink and

telling Pompey to give that to the one that sent him, Mr. Markham glanced around exultingly as if to say, “I’m not the man to be easily taken in.” In a few minutes Pompey returned with a similar letter for Robert Gray. Robert was half-way out to the office before he remembered the joke of the morning and what day it was; still he was not sure it might be something, and he could not afford to let a chance go.

“Well, Grey,” commenced Mr. Burke, “I don’t know how *you* feel, but I’ll be glad when this day is over. They began at home this morning, and it seems to have been pretty well kept up all day. That inside door has never been shut. And now Mr. Markham must needs finish the business by trying a joke on me. Look at that,” and Mr. Burke held up a letter addressed to Mr. Markham, but unopened, and the words “April Fool,” in large characters and red ink. “But he overdid it this time.” Although Robert had no liking for Mr. Markham, he thought it unmanly in himself to stand without trying to show where the mistake was.

“Oh, I know all about that. He thought he was being fooled, and so might you, but you had the respect for me to come and see.” Like a great many of his kind, Mr. Burke was very particular as to the quantity and quality of respect shown him.

“Now I’ll tell you what it was for. Elliott is to leave in a day or two, and his place is yours if you like. I offered it, or at least would have offered it to Mr. Markham,—not that I like him any better, mind you. The fact is, Markham is getting a little snappy, I’m afraid, to the customers, and he makes so much fuss about everything; some days when I go in there I can think of nothing but a hen with one chicken, the way he flies about. I offered it to him, I say, because he has been a good while with me, and is older than you.”

It was a hard thing to do, but Robert said that, as it was through a mistake, should not Mr. Markham have another offer,

“Never from me,” said Mr. Burke with great emphasis. “Why did he not come and find out? The man ought to be able to take a joke if he isn’t.” Lack of respect to