

A FOOL AND HIS FOLLY

The girls agreed that something should be done to celebrate the occasion; the opportunity occurring, as it did, but once a year—was not lightly to be missed, and it might be regarded as in complete consistency with the duties of educated young ladies to treat with respect the time-honored traditions of the calendar—to illustrate, in fact, this respect by some practical expression of it.

It was precisely, however, the form in which this practical expression was to be best embodied that at the present moment engaged their considerations to the point of an almost pathetic perplexity. There is perhaps nothing more serious in nature than the seriousness of a dozen young—very young—ladies employed in the earnest discussion of some problem of which the proper solution will affect most intimately their own immediate entertainment. They are not concerned with the gravity of the dippancy of the matter per se, but only with its direct relations toward their innocent little pleasures.

And so in the present case, the dozen elder girls assembled in the schoolroom of Miss Primbird's Advanced Seminary for Young Ladies—the school is a well-known one in the county town of X—, and, indeed, occupies a deservedly high position, and enjoys a wide patronage among the best families in the country—were considerably exercised in their gentle minds to arrive at a fitting conclusion upon the very important issue which had been suggested to them by the reflection that the following day was the first of April.

To attempt to engage on such an occasion in any pleasantries, however innocent and amiable, at the expense of the august and somewhat forbidding Miss Primbird herself was not to be thought of for a single moment—or, if thought of, to be dismissed almost instantly with a sigh of regret at the utter impracticability of putting the bewitching idea into execution. Other proposals of a not dissimilar nature were in turn suggested, and in turn reluctantly abandoned on much the same grounds. Something, however, would certainly have to be done, they agreed; something, if possible, a little extravagant, a trifle daring; something, at least, genial and inspiring and worthy of their achievement; but what?

Then, breaking a momentary silence, the prettiest of them spoke, a demure smile rippling the smooth surface of her exquisite young face and lighting her eyes with the arch dawning of a sudden spirit of mischief.

"Girls," she said, "since we cannot, with impunity, play a practical joke upon Prim—though," she added, with a sigh, "it would be heaven if we could—"

"Oh, heavenly!" cooed a chorus of voices. "Yes; but she would never forgive us if we made an April fool of her," objected the fair speaker. "Her outraged dignity would never survive the shock—and we should never survive her outraged dignity! It would mean expulsion at the least—with disgrace."

There was a general lugubrious assent. "But," proceeded the gentle young goddess, smiling round at her companions, "since we must leave Prim alone, what do you say to—Solomon?"

"Solomon!" cried the others, in ecstatic acknowledgment of this brilliant and quite original inspiration. "Solomon! Splendid! Why didn't we think of him before?" Then they paused and looked to the genius from whom this inspiration had sprung to develop it further.

"Solomon," she proceeded, "was made to be an April fool. There can be no doubt about it. To-morrow morning he will come to give us his weekly lecture."

"Yes, yes! But how are you going to make a fool of him, Poppet?" demanded half a dozen voices. "Nothing easier," said Poppet, loftily (for this was the young goddess' familiar name among her fellowes).

"See up the sleeves of his overcoat!" suggested one. "Or give him a bouquet of peppered flowers?" proposed another. Poppet glanced scornfully at the speakers.

"No. We will leave babies' tricks like those to the Lower Fourth. If you please," she said, contemptuously. "Remember, we are not children."

The girls drew themselves up at this dignified reminder. The youngest of them was sixteen; Poppet herself was seventeen and a half. "Children," indeed!

ten and posted the letter that evening (after submitting it to the approval of her school-fellows), the pretty young creature became aware of some singular qualms of conscience, strangely at variance with the spirit of humor which the inception of this project had originally produced in her breast. Yet, although she began to feel less sure now than at first that the experiment would be productive of as "great fun" as she imagined, she resolutely refused to admit this suspicion even to herself, and returned home obstinately cheerful.

Now, the gentleman referred to as "Solomon" by the pretty school-girls was no other than the able lecturer on moral philosophy, whose brilliant services Miss Primbird had been fortunate enough to secure once a week for the benefit of the young ladies of the seminary, and whose name conspicuously placed on the list of the school staff in Miss Primbird's prospectus, lent an additional distinction and lustre to the already distinguished reputation of Miss Primbird's establishment. The soubriquet of "Solomon" had been, in pure good-nature, bestowed upon the lecturer by his fair young pupils in recognition of the extreme wisdom they attributed to him, or, maybe, from a certain grave decorumness of demeanor which habitually marked his bearing toward them.

The lecturer was a tall, rather ungainly young man—youth, that is to say, as it seemed, incredibly old—grave with the gravity of the "fifties," serious and solemn with the seriousness of a man to whom whose own simplicity of heart renders him incapable of suspecting duplicity of motive in others, whose singleness of purpose seeks to find its reflection in the straightforward honesty of all with whom he may have dealings, doubting their good faith and their sincerity in the smallest matter no more than he could conceive them to doubt his.

Least of all the kind of man who could be expected to appreciate or understand that attitude of mind which is able to treat even the most serious matters with a levity and flippancy of spirit so completely alien to his own conceptions of what is due to the nobler feelings of humanity. He was not himself insensible to the influence of the emotion; but outside his profession and in his merely social relations, a certain natural awkwardness, the shy reserve of a man who is conscious of his external disadvantages, gave him an air of diffidence and coldness which suggested a passionless temperament.

So far, however, from being indifferent to the gentler aspirations of the heart the lecturer, like many lonely natures, was possessed with a deep craving for some of that love which he saw so lavishly scattered among her men around him—the love of woman. His heart hungered for affection, yet for him it seemed there were to be no ties of wife, home and family. Loveless and lonely he must pursue his solitary way alone. It was a cold destiny for a man of thirty to receive, and when his duties took him, as they periodically did, into the midst of a garden of fair young ladies, with their soft, winning ways, and gentle voices and bright eyes, it seemed colder and harder still. Other men would be made happy some day by these fair young creatures, but they were not for him.

And, thinking especially of one pair of exceptionally bright eyes, of one soft, smiling face, the lecturer would sigh. More than once during his lectures in the schoolroom he had fancied these particular eyes resting on his own with something of tenderness, of sympathy, and his heart had swelled with a silent gratitude to the gentle possessor of them. Ah, what would he give to call such eyes, such lips, such sweet, serious, graciousness his own!

The lecturer, indeed, had but the most superficial acquaintance with the mysterious rays of the beautiful human creature called a girl. When, therefore, he found on his breakfast table one morning a little, pink, dainty looking envelope addressed in a dainty little girlish hand to himself his first wonderment gave way to a rapid succession of very singular emotions, quite foreign hitherto to his experience, as he read the delicate little missive to its end, and then stood a moment, trembling with it in his hands, collecting his rebellious thoughts with an effort, he read the note through again. It ran thus:

"Dear Mr. Morland,—I feel terribly shy about writing to you, but I hope I know that you will forgive me. I feel perplexed and troubled—I don't know quite how to explain it, but you are so clever, so kind and good that I am sure I may count upon you to give me your advice upon the subject, which is rather a delicate one. Please let me speak to you alone after class to-morrow morning for a few minutes. I will stay behind the other girls. Yours most sincerely, "Dorothy Dewdrop."

Had he been more a man of the world and less of an idealist the lecturer would have suspected some of the woman's sighing craftiness in this apparently artless girl's note. Indeed, the wicked little lines breathed audibly of mischief; but the lecturer guessed it not, and he did a very curious thing. Instead of throwing the note into the fire with a laugh—and, possible, a promise to himself to take advantage of this opportunity of a stolen flirtation with a pretty pupil—he pressed the scented paper to his lips. Dorothy Dewdrop! It was Dorothy Dewdrop whose soft, serious eyes had rested on his face so often and so tenderly (as he flattered himself) during his class lectures, and now she—she had written to him! Forgive her? Ah, what would he not forgive that gentle, smiling angel? She was perplexed and troubled and wanted his advice on a delicate subject. What could it mean?

At length—as it seemed by some purely mechanical process—he finished his breakfast and found himself in his usual place in the class-room of Miss Primbird's Seminary, with his fresh young pupils arranged dutifully round him. For an hour he lectured to them wisely, passionately, on moral philosophy; yet, when he thought of it afterward, he could not remember one single word of what he had said during that hour; he even vaguely wondered whether he had not been talking nonsense.

The hour came to an end, however, as hours will, whether joy or sorrow pain or pleasure and the class rose, and posted the letter that evening (after submitting it to the approval of her school-fellows), the pretty young creature became aware of some singular qualms of conscience, strangely at variance with the spirit of humor which the inception of this project had originally produced in her breast.

Yet, although she began to feel less sure now than at first that the experiment would be productive of as "great fun" as she imagined, she resolutely refused to admit this suspicion even to herself, and returned home obstinately cheerful.

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There was the usual kaleidoscope of butterfly movements, the usual ripple of laughing voices, the opening of a door—and then the lecturer looked up and found himself alone in the room. Not quite alone, though. A tall, graceful figure appeared suddenly, standing by his desk, and a little timidly up into his own and immediately fell with a pretty embarrassment as they encountered the lecturer's gaze.

"I—I got your note, Miss Dewdrop," the lecturer began, after an instant's pause; then he stopped short and blushed.

"Oh, thank you; it was so good of you!" replied Miss Dewdrop—who was no other than "Poppet"—blushing, too. The remark was a trifle elliptical, but the lecturer did not appear to notice it. He felt ill at ease, shy, nervous—and yet strangely happy. For the first time in his life he was alone, face to face, with a young girl who seemed to want him, not as a lecturer, but perhaps, as—as a friend. He dared not own to himself that he had long worshipped silently this very same young girl, but dim consciousness of the truth may have contributed somewhat to the embarrassment—and the delight—of the moment.

"No; do not say that!" interrupted the lecturer hastily. "You have nothing to thank me for. If the matter that troubles you perplexes you—is one in which I can give you any advice or assistance, Miss Dewdrop, believe me there is nothing—nothing—that would afford me greater pleasure than to—help you." He concluded, rather lamely.

Perceiving the lecturer's growing embarrassment, Miss Poppet regained with proportionate rapidity her own equanimity, and, casting infinite demure eyes upon the lecturer's face, replied:

"You are very kind, Mr. Morland. But I do not know how to tell you—it is very difficult. In fact, I—I—She broke down with a wonderful affectation of diffidence and stood a moment silent—a very beautiful picture of maiden distress.

"Do not be afraid to tell me," he said, gently. "If you think I can be of any use to you."

"You—you do not understand girls," she retorted, desperately, "or else—"

"No," he meekly acknowledged, "I am afraid I—I have had very little experience with—girls. But," he glanced at the young lady a little appealingly—"I should like to try and—understand if you would tell me."

"Oh, can't you guess?" exclaimed Miss Poppet, impatiently. "Can't you see, Mr. Morland? I wanted to tell you my difficulty and ask you to help me—to try and cure it, for I thought you must have found it out, too! A girl can't tell a man, that she—"

The lecturer drew a deep breath. "Tell him—what?" he inquired, slowly. "That she—loves him!" Poppet replied in a low voice. "She can't tell him that—in so many words, Mr. Morland?"

"In so many words—no, I suppose not," answered the lecturer, in the tone of a man confronted suddenly by some weighty philosophical proposition.

"Then what can she do?" demanded Poppet, helplessly. "Miss Dewdrop," rejoined the lecturer, looking down, "I'm afraid it's hardly a subject in which I am competent to advise you. Why do you ask me?"

"Because you are wise, clever and know things," was her ready reply. "Because moral philosophy should embrace all subjects connected with the problems of human emotion! Because you are the—the—" She stopped abruptly.

The lecturer looked up and his pale face flushed with a new emotion hitherto unconsidered in the researches of moral philosophers.

"Because I am the—" His voice shook with some wild, suppressed hope.

There came from behind the door a sudden sound of suppressed tittering. The lecturer started and half turned his head. The tittering ceased.

"Miss Dewdrop," he went on, "it seems too great a thing for me to believe! But, oh, if it is true, may God bless you!" Poppet stirred uneasily. "Once," continued the lecturer, dreamily, "I had a little sister—much, very much, younger than myself, she was all the world to me."

Miss Dewdrop, and—she died. Had she lived she would have been about the same age as you are, and just the same sweet, gracious girl, though not so beautiful. Since then I have never known what it meant to hear a girl's voice speak to me in kind and gentle accents until—to-day, and Miss Dewdrop, for what you have just said, may Heaven forever bless you, dear. But you are young, and I cannot—dare not—take you at your word. You say you love me? Ah, but not as I love you, and shall ever love you—now! You will forget—but I shall remember. You will love and marry some—other man, more suitable to a glorious young thing like you than I—"

He paused and Miss Poppet raised to him a face of flame.

"Stop," Mr. Morland," she cried. "Stop! Oh, I have been so wicked—brute! I do not love you!"

There came again a sudden peal of merry laughter (louder this time) from outside the door.

"Do you not see," went on Poppet, hurriedly, "it's all a joke? The whole thing is a joke—my letter and all! To-day is the first of April!"

The lecturer rose to his feet unsteadily.

"Ah—yes; of course," he said, with a sickly smile. "A joke to be sure—a very good joke! Ha, ha! How foolish of me to have been taken in! But I—I saw through it all—from the first, Miss Dewdrop—I saw through it—of course!"

"Of course!" said Poppet, stoutly. Then she took the professor's hand in her warm, slender little fingers.

"Forgive me," she said, very softly. "Yes," he said, "I forgive you."

Then he added: "God bless you, Miss Dewdrop!" and sighed—Emeric Hull-Beaman in London Sketch.

"Ireland in the New Century" Sir Horace Plunkett's new book has the following preface:

"Those who have known Ireland for the last dozen years cannot have failed to notice the advent of a wholly new spirit, clearly based upon constructive thought, and expressing itself in a wide range of practical activities. The movement for the organization of agriculture and rural credit on co-operative lines, efforts of various kinds to revive old or initiate new industries, and lastly, the creation of a department of Government to foster all that was healthy in the voluntary effort of the people to better up the economic side of their lives, are each interesting in themselves. When taken together, and in conjunction with the literary and artistic movements, and viewed in their relation to history, politics, religion, education, and the other past and present influences operating upon the Irish mind and character, these movements appear to me to be worthy of the most thoughtful consideration by all who are responsible for, or desire the well-being of, the Irish people."

I should not, however, in days when my whole time and energies were taken to the public service, have undertaken the task of writing a book on a subject so complex and apparently so inseparable from heated controversy were I not convinced that the expression of certain thoughts which have come to me from practical contact with Irish problems, was the best contribution I could make to the work on which I was engaged. I wished, if I could, to bring into clearer light the essential unity of the various progressive movements in Ireland, and to do something towards promoting a greater definiteness of aim and method, and a better understanding of each other's work, among those who are in various ways striving for the upbuilding of a worthy national life in Ireland.

So far the task, if difficult, was congenial and free from embarrassment. Unhappily, it has borne in upon me, in the course of a long study of Irish life, that our failure to rise to our opportunities and to give practical evidence of the intellectual qualities with which the race is admittedly gifted, was due to certain defects of character, not ethnically grave but economically paralyzing. I need hardly say I refer to the lack of moral courage, initiative, independence, and self-reliance—defects which, however they may be accounted for, it is the first duty of modern Ireland to recognize and overcome. I believe in the new movements in Ireland, principally because they seem to me to exert a stimulating influence upon our moral fibre.

J. E. SEAGRAM DISTILLER AND DIRECT IMPORTER OF WINES, LIQUORS AND MALT AND FAMILY PROOF WHISKIES, OLD RYE, ETC. WATERLOO, ONTARIO

Centenary of St. Gregory the Great The Archbishop of Westminster on the Celebration. His Grace Archbishop Bourne in his Lenten Pastoral thus refers to the centenary of St. Gregory: We are pleading for the Christianity of England, and in a few weeks we shall be keeping the solemn centenary of the great Roman Pontiff, St. Gregory the Great, to whom our nation owes her Faith in Christ.

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Death of Mr. James McCann, M.P. The Dublin Freeman's Journal says: It is with sincere regret that we announce the death of Mr. James McCann, M.P., which occurred at his residence, Simmons Court Castle, Donnybrook. His death at the comparatively early age of 63, in the midst of a busy life devoted to the public service, is an event to be deplored, and it is rendered all the more melancholy by reason of its almost startling suddenness.

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SCRULL SAWS and LATHES Rice Lewis & Son LIMITED Cor. KING & VICTORIA ST., TORONTO traversed line. That Bourke reached there has since been thoroughly established and proven, though doubted at the time. He faced and conquered the "great unknown," suffering innumerable hardships and privations, many of which would have unquestionably been avoided had he had the good fortune to have been an accomplished bushman."

Death of an Irish-Australian Explorer Mr. Harry Stockdale records in the columns of the Sydney "Freeman's Journal" the death of Robert O'Hara Bourke, an Irish-Australian, the first man who, without any Bush lore, crossed the Australian Continent. "He struck boldly out," according to the writer, "from the now famous water-hole of Cooly-murra, at Innaminka, Cooper's Creek, Central Australia, for the far off shores of Carpentaria, a totally unknown, un-