

Chapter the Thirty-seventh

APRIL FOOLS

THE last ejaculation of Chapter XXXVI will serve as an admirable summary of the positions in which a number of our characters found themselves on April the First, in the year whose annals include this small history.

There is a peculiar happiness of choice in making the first day of that treacherous and feminine month coincide with the humiliation of a large number of worthy people. We plunge into April with a prodigious expectation of jollity : we delight in the sound of her name, liquid as the song of a thrush ; we strut in the sunshine, fling off our surtouts, recline on banks where the painted adder lurks and the East wind cuts down from the high pastures, and altogether behave in a very foolish fashion. The heavens have taken a deeper blue ; so among the cowslips we contemplate their azure until a black squall blows along, stings our rash necks with perilous hailstones and drives us headlong to the shelter of the pale green hedgerows. There on the drifted leaves of dead Octobers, we are scratched by the crimson thorns of briars and, slowly acquiring an extensive rheumatism, wish very sincerely we had never stirred from the hearth where the wise pages of Montaigne or La Rochefoucauld lie dog-eared through our precipitate adventure.

Yet, after all, it is better to be a fool in April than a wise man in November. Pit and boxes hear the ravings of the mad Ophelia with the sense of superiority secured by plush, but the most of them would be better men and women for having gathered that nosegay of columbines and rue.

So drop a tear for Phyllida. She was the heroine of the