

as the train has been gone for an hour," was the way he tried to quiet his conscience.

At noon, however, he was so full of the pranks to be played that night that he never thought of the letter once, and if his conscience reminded him of the neglected duty again he quitted it in some way, and went home in the evening with the letter still in his pocket, instead of in his uncle John's possession, as it should have been. When the evening train came in, who should come off it but this same Uncle John, and the first thing his father said, after the greetings were over, was, "Well, John, how did you succeed in that little deal? I hope you got my letter in good time."

"Your letter! Why no, I got no letter," exclaimed Uncle John. "No indeed, and you missed the chance of a lifetime by not notifying me. I never hated to see anything go into the hands of another man so badly in my life as I did when that beauty was knocked down to Mr. English, and at half price too."

"There must have been some trickery about the matter then; somebody must have been meddling with the mail, for I wrote you early this morning, advising you to buy the pony on the terms specified in your letter received last night," replied Mr. Horton.

"It did not reach me," returned his brother. "Fearing there might be some carelessness in the delivery, I went to the office myself, after the noon mail came in, but there was nothing there. The oversight must have been in the office here."

"Did you mail that letter, Elbert?" demanded Mr. Horton, turning to the culprit who stood by the window, trembling.

"I forgot," stammered the boy, looking confused.

"And after all my charges!" said his father sternly. "Why did you put the letter out of your hand at all until it was safe in the office?"

"I met the boys and they would have me go down to the tank to play a fool's day trick on Joe Kelly, and I forgot all about the letter until the school-bell rang," explained Elbert, ruefully.

"April-fooling, eh," said his father, with a peculiar look that Elbert did not understand. "Well, we shall see who the April-fool was in this instance. Have you the letter still in your pocket?"

"Yes, sir," replied Elbert, producing the

letter, somewhat crumpled from its contact with a real boy's pocket.

When he offered it to his uncle, he shook his head, saying, "Open it and read it; then you will understand what your father means."

Elbert obeyed, and this is what he read: "Dear John:—I have your letter giving terms and description of the Shetland pony which you say Mr. Barnes will hold until noon, awaiting my decision. Elbert has long wanted such a pony, and as I am sure he will take good care of it I would not miss the bargain for anything. Secure it by all means, and bring it out with you when you come this evening. I wish to give him a genuine surprise, and as this is fool's day, I have taken it into my head to do a little April-fooling myself."

"Hoping to see you and the pony this evening, I remain as ever, your brother—

JOHN.

"Now you know the secret of this important letter, and understand why I said another person as well as myself would be disappointed if it missed the morning mail," said Mr. Horton.

"If I had known what it was I would have remembered better," replied Elbert.

"Ah, yes, but it was a surprise," argued his father. "And then boys should be as trustworthy where their own interests are not at stake as where they are. There is a good deal of poetic justice in the way this thing has turned out. All your life your unfaithfulness to duty has given you, as well as other people, trouble. How often have you been told that duty should always have the right of way when it seems to conflict with pleasure, and now more forcibly than ever before, perhaps, you have learned the lesson from experience, an experience which I trust may never have to be repeated. I know you are disappointed; but if your disappointment teaches the much needed lesson of prompt obedience, it will be worth all that it costs. Remember, a boy's faults, if uncorrected, will cling to him in manhood, and it would be as unreasonable to expect an unreliable boy to grow up into a trustworthy man as to count on seeing a crooked, deformed sprout grow into a straight and beautiful tree."

Though smarting with the sting he had inflicted upon himself, Elbert was just enough to indorse his father's words and to determine to overcome this evil habit, and if he come off conqueror the April-fool experience will prove of more value to him than half-a-dozen Shetland ponies.—*Sci.*