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April fool is fun around the world

Witch Watch
by GUNDELLA

The first of April, some do say, is set apart for All Fool's Day. But why the people call it so. Nor I, nor they themselves do know. But on this day are people sent On purpose of pure merriment.

—Poor Robin's Almanack, 1780

The vernal equinox, which occurs around March 21, has been observed by all kinds of people since the beginning of time.

Until the event of the Gregorian calendar, adopted in the sixteenth century, March 21 was also the beginning of the new year. In those days, the new year was celebrated for an entire week, and on the last, or eighth, day of celebrating, it was customary to visit the homes of one's friends and neighbors to exchange greetings and gifts.

IN 1582, when Pope Gregory introduced the new calendar, March 21 was no longer the beginning of the new year, and April 1st was no longer the important day it had been in the combined celebration of the New Year and the vernal equinox.

In those days no one traveled very slowly and, for many years, people continued to celebrate April 1 by exchanging greetings and gifts. These people, who clung to the old calendar, either out of ignorance or stubbornness, became known as April fools. The first day of April gradually developed into a day of fooling and being fooled. It is believed that the custom originated in France and spread to England and beyond.

In India March 31 is called "Holi," and it is customary for Hindus of every class to play jokes on each other by sending people on fruitless errands. One would naturally suppose that "Holi" and April Fool's Day are of the same origin.

In CERTAIN parts of England, the time for playing April Fool's jokes is limited to the morning hours. If anyone should forget this rule and play a joke after noon, the fooler becomes the fool. Hence, in Hampshire they say, "April Fool's time is past and you're the biggest fool at last."

In France a person fooled on April 1st is called an April fish, "un poisson d'avril," perhaps because he "bites" on a joke and is caught.

In Scotland the April fool is called an April-gowk. (A gook is a cuckoo). One old Scottish folk rhyme goes this way:

On the first day of Aprile,
Hunt the gook another mile.

When a Scot sends a victim on a foolish errand to find some sweet vinegar, a stick with one end or a left-handed monkey wrench, they say he is "hunting the gook."

In England, one who falls victim to such pranks is called an April Noodle, a gawky, a gabby, or an April Fool.

TODAY, 200 KEEPERS across the country will receive countless calls for Mr. Fox and Mrs. Wolfe, switchboard operators who say the "line is busy" will be asked by the prankster to connect him with the "lionsess," and hundreds of schoolteachers will receive notes which, when opened, read "April Fool" printed in a childish hand.

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