

BOYS AND GIRLS

On the Seabird's Cliff.

(Caroline K. Herrick, in 'The Youth's Companion'.)

'Mother,' cried Duncan Ashcroft one afternoon in May, clattering upstairs with noise enough for a centaur, 'mother, we had a jolly time in school this afternoon! Mr. Brayne gave a lecture,—the great ornithologist, you know—and he said he would answer any questions the boys wanted to ask. So I asked him everything I hadn't been able to find out from the books, and I told him about my photographs; and he said I have been very successful, and he didn't know another observer of my age who had photographed a loon's nest for himself.'

Mrs. Ashcroft looked properly pleased.

'And this is the best part of it, mother,' Duncan went on. 'He told me about a little island just north of the New England coast where he went with a camera last year, and he says I could get a hundred pictures there. There's only a fisherman and his wife on the island. They would take the best care of me, and the board is so cheap that the cost of getting there wouldn't count, and—and—'

The boy stopped to get his breath, while his mother, with a look of utter bewilderment on her face, cried:

'What are you thinking of, Duncan? Do you mean that we should spend the summer in a fisherman's cottage?'

'No, mother,' he answered. 'I suppose it wouldn't be a good place for you, but I could get along very comfortably there; and Mr. Hartley told Mr. Brayne that he believed it was just the thing I needed.'

'Well,' said Mrs. Ashcroft, slowly, 'I am not sure but that it would be a good idea. With your singing and your school work, and the extra time you have put in with your camera, you have had altogether too busy a year, Duncan, and you ought to have a real vacation. I had not thought that we could go anywhere this summer except to Uncle Josiah's, as usual; but you have been there so many times, and this would be a genuine chance for you. It probably wouldn't be at all expensive, either. Well, I'll see about it, dear.'

After a correspondence with Mr. Brayne and the choir-master under whom Duncan sang at St. John's, Mrs. Ashcroft decided that the principal was quite right in thinking that a few weeks spent on the island would be the best kind of a vacation for her city-bred boy.

As a consequence, the eighth of June found Duncan snugly installed in the little attic chamber of Capt. Zebedee Jenks's cottage, the only habitation—except seabirds' nests—on Lonely Isle.

Carefully reared as he was, Duncan Ashcroft had all a healthy boy's delight in 'roughing it,' and the primitive life of the fisherman's home was fascinating to him. His bedroom was unplastered and draughty, but large enough except in height; his head had many a bump on the rafters of the sloping roof. On his first trip to the mainland he bought some shirts of coarse flannel, such as the fishermen wore, and those he had brought from home were laid away, to be used only on special occasions—of which there were not many in the calendar of Lonely Isle.

He proved an apt pupil in the fisherman's craft, and Captain Zebedee and his

son Orlando liked to have him with them when about their work, which was almost all upon the sea or the beach.

They cultivated a small garden-patch for the sake of a few vegetables, which could not be procured in any other way; but the sea was their field, and they worked it diligently day and night. So Duncan often rowed the dory, and gathered the herring from the nets in the cold summer dawns, and walked around the beach, lifting the curtains of kelp that hung about the base of the boulders and catching the clumsy lobsters as they tried to scuttle away. His face was brown and his hands

preacher from one of the villages on the mainland would spend a Sunday on the nearest island, Big Sister, where there were a village, a summer boarding-house and several farms.

Then word was sent round that there would be preaching in the schoolhouse; and, wind and weather permitting, Captain Jenks and his family would sail over to Big Sister and attend service, and Duncan would add his fine young voice to the little choir.

In the evening, Duncan would sit on the door-stone and sing the old, familiar hymns for which he needed no words or notes



A ROPE! BRING A ROPE!

hard, and he grew taller and stronger on the plain hard fare of the cottage.

And the birds! Never was there a better hunting-ground for the naturalist. And there was plenty of occupation for every rainy day in writing out the notes, which he took in abundance.

One day was much like another in this simple life, except that the return of Sunday gave a rest from the fishing. Then Captain Jenks sat on the front porch and read the Rivermouth 'Weekly Clarion,' and Mrs. Jenks laid aside her endless knitting and wore a white apron, and Orlando put on a necktie, and Mandy tied her hair with a pink ribbon, and Duncan donned one of his city shirts; and they all walked round the island at sunset.

There were few chances to attend a church service. At long intervals a

and his delighted audience could hardly find words in which to express their pleasure.

His voice, well trained by a number of years in the choir, was clear and sweet, and Mrs. Jenks's knitting-needles would often cease to click and her busy hands would drop idly in her lap as she listened.

On rainy days, too, when Duncan sang over his work in the attic chamber, Mrs. Jenks would steal to the foot of the rough stairway and stand, forgetting her household cares and her weariness in her enjoyment of his song.

'I b'lieve I'd know his voice a mile on to sea,' she said to her husband one day. 'There's nothing in the world that I ever heard a bit like it.'

Lonely Isle, on its southern side, rose abruptly out of the sea in a high cliff, the