

may-blossom of them all. She hastily jumped from the stool as she caught sight of Asaph, not, however, before he had seen her and had asked permission to come inside the gate.

"What! Master Halnaker, going to the music?" said she.

"Yes," he replied; "but there's time enough for that. Mayn't I just come in and help you gather the laylock? I've been wanting to see you, to tell you as I'd got a bird for you o' mother's own breeding. If it sings like its father, it should make a deal o' music in the house. But, Mercy," he continued, in more earnest tones, "you have some't to say to me first. I've got the job up by Absters, and that'll put a good bit o' money in my pocket, and I've planned it all so as to spend nothing when I'm away, and now that is so, Mercy dear, and the house is all ready, and mother so anxious, won't you say you'll be mine, and let me go and tell y're father? I know that you're above me, and that, mayhap, y're father will be lookin' higher for ye; but ye'll never find a man to love ye better, an' I'll wait on ye, an' learn o' ye, and Mercy dear."

How it was they never knew, but Mercy dropped an apronful of great branches of lilac, and found herself gathered into Asaph's strong arms and her head upon his shoulder.

The course of true love never did run smooth, and, favourite as he was of the country-side, Asaph had his difficulties. Mercy's father expected her to marry money and keep a maidservant, to have farm-servants under her, and to be a thriving farmer's wife as her mother had been before her; but Mercy was his favourite child, and there was no denying that young Asaph was a credit to the place, and might in time become a man of importance and command in the woods. So a somewhat reluctant consent was won from the parents, the marriage was to take place early in the next spring, and Mercy was to spend the long days in sewing for her new home, while Asaph went up to Absters for the copse work.

Once or twice in the autumn Asaph came home, but it was a long tramp from Absters, and he resolutely denied himself the hire of any sort of conveyance however humble. The folk in our village are not given to letter-writing, and, though Asaph so far forgot himself as to send one letter to his sweetheart, it would have been considered beneath his dignity, as a man of sense, to write oftener.

Mercy hemmed and sewed, and stitched and blushed, as she put in the red letters on the household linen which joined their names together—and so autumn and winter came and went. The weather was chill and very dry, when one day in early spring a rumour came to the village that a man was very ill—of fever, so it was said—up at Absters, and that there were children down with it, too. The nearest doctor was communicated with, and he, saddling his horse, at once rode up.

Absters is the name given to a straggling collection of rough houses on either side of a green lane. It can in no sense be called a village; there is neither church nor school, nor, more wonderful still, public-house. The whole hillside is dense forest, but on the edge there is a clearing running for about three quarters of a mile, with scattered houses on either side the green way. The houses are not regularly inhabited; the population is a wandering one, the whole place, though strangely fascinating, is lonely and very wild.

When the worthy doctor arrived he inquired first after the children, and found that several of them were down with typhoid fever, fortunately, as it seemed to him, of a mild type. He had almost forgotten the existence of the supposed adult patient when a big lad came to tell him "that the man was took very bad like."

The doctor asked to be taken to his quarters, and was greatly surprised to be told that he had no quarters, and that he could not see him.

"No quarters!" said the doctor. "Why, where does he lodge, and, pray, why can't I see him?"

"Well, dy'er see, it's this way," said the tall lad; "many of our folk in the forest they don't lie o' nights in houses; and this chap he was doin' it on the cheap for his marriage, and so he just took a fox-hole and there he be, and there he mun bide, and ye can't get to see him."

"Good heavens!" shouted the doctor; "but I must see him—take me to the place."

The lad accordingly led the way off the main track to where a deep cutting had been made for hauling timber, and there the sand-banks lay high and steep. Looking up he saw what the boy called "fox-holes," but which, in truth, looked much more like the nests made by some gigantic form of sand-martin. Each hole was sufficiently wide to enable a man to creep in on all fours, and was deep enough, he was assured, inside to enable him to stretch himself at full length. Rude beds, indeed, but protected from wind and weather, and warm in the sheltering sand.

"He's in there," said the lad, pointing to one of the largest of the holes, "an' he's very bad; he cries and moans something fearful, but ye can't get in."

"Can't I," said the doctor, and stripping off his coat he prepared to climb the bank.

"It's very narrow," he exclaimed, when his eyes were on a level with the hole, and he could see something like the dark form of a man lying inside; "but I'm only a little one"—and with much care and precaution he crawled over the poor helpless body. When after two or three moments he reappeared his look was very grave.

"We must get him out of this at all costs," he said. "If I had only known of this earlier!"

And so with infinite care and tenderness the sick man was pulled out of his strange resting-place, feet first, and carried on a sort of leafy stretcher to the nearest house where the good doctor could find a comfortable bed.

"Who is it?" asked he, when he had lain the fever-tossed limbs between the cool sheets.

"Zaph Halnaker," was the reply. "He wanted to make a good thing this bout, an' he wouldn't pay for no lodging. There's a many o' the young fellows travellin' in the woods does the like, an' they never come to no harm."

But poor Asaph never rallied, in spite of all the care and nursing of the doctor. Some hours he lingered, moaning constantly, and muttering of his marriage, of Mercy, and his mother. At last, on the following day, when the cold March sun was setting behind the hill, he raised himself in bed and whistled. Those about him drew back in dismay. "Coming, mother," he said, and so with a smile he died.

They made a litter and covered it with fern and laid the brave young fellow upon it, and loyal comrades bore him home, past the homestead on the hill, up the rugged path, to the Crow's Nest, where his mother awaited him.

Mrs. Halnaker lived to be an old, old woman, and she has told me many times that it was no news to her when poor Mercy came to break the sad tidings to her.

"I was sitting by the window," said she, "mendin' o' his clothes, an' I heard our whistle. I went out an' I looked around, an' I could see naught, nor hear naught; an' then it came to me," she would say in a low, awe-struck voice, "as it was his father whistlin'. I thought it must be for me, but it was him he warnted, an' I think it can't be very long now before he calls me, too."

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Music.

THE choir of the West Presbyterian Church, under the direction of Mr. W. J. McNally, is at work on Gaul's "Ruth," which is to be performed in the church in a few weeks.

Vanoni is singing again in London.

Mr. Rudolph Aronson last week concluded by cable negotiations long pending for the appearance in America (after an absence of seven years) of the celebrated pianiste, Teresa Carreno.

E. A. McDowell, the composer, has been appointed to the head of the new musical department in Columbia College. He is of the same age as Paderewski, and the New York Post says of him that he "has no superior among the living composers of Europe."

Frederick William Nichols Crouch, the author of "Kathleen Mavourneen," who died a few days ago at the age of eighty-eight, had been married four times and was the father of twenty-seven children. He was a native of London, but for nearly fifty years had lived in Baltimore.