

ONCE ON A MAY NIGHT

BY CHARLES ADAMS.

My old home county in Maine was largely settled by people of purely English descent, who brought with them not only a distinctly English pronunciation of the language, but many of the games and pastimes of old England. Among these was the custom of going a-maying every spring—although very often scarcely a flower had appeared, and snowdrifts were still lingering in the hollows and in the lee of the fences and thickets.

Rarely, indeed, were we able to find more than a few hepaticas and stone-crops. Wakerobins were never in bloom, or violets, or even the arbutus, or Mayflower.

Spring there was really too backward for May-day fetes. Only once, in my youngest remembrance, was a May-pole raised, and pretty Selma Eastman crowned queen of the May.

Going a-maying had already begun to give place to the more American and livelier pastime of hanging May-baskets on May-day night—a custom less ancient but far more frolicsome. Hard running and much wild excitement often attended the hanging of May-baskets.

Ridicule fell to the boy who was caught in the act. The boy setting off to hang a May-basket must approach the house door, affix his offering to it, and knock three times; and it might happen that the girls within, or their unfeeling brothers, were lying in wait, peeping out, maybe, at some dark window. Then hardly would the first knock be given when out would rush the whole ambuscade, shouting exultantly. Here was where the hard running came in, with frantic dodging and doubling about yard fences, wood-piles and corn-cribs.

Selma Eastman was a slim, quiet, wild-rose of a girl, with shy eyes and a wealth of wavy brown hair; and she seemed never to realize how pretty she was, or to take note of the admiration that was showered upon her. For there was not a boy round there who did not worship her in his heart.

Of all these youthful admirers, none, I think, was more fond or devoted than my brother Poley. This may explain why he set off one evening—and took me along with him—to hang a May-basket.

It was a rather fine basket and well filled. There was a pound of chocolates, a little volume of Longfellow's poems, a game of authors, and other little things which he thought would please Selma. I did not feel any great interest in it myself; but brother must stand by brother, particularly when he is a twin brother, so I went along to help him out.

It was not altogether a safe place to go to by night on such an errand. Mr.

Eastman, the father, was not well disposed toward visiting boys. Moreover, he had a big Newfoundland dog, old Scoge, who had a reputation for biting at night. So Poley coaxed me to go along, with a club for the dog, in case he was set upon us. Poley's own hands were too full of the May-basket, which, with its long, crinkled paper streamers, was about the worst thing possible to transport two miles across country by night.

There was no moon. The night was a little moist and misty, but not very dark; and the loons were calling to one another on the lake down the valley. We proceeded by a lumber road, through wood-lots, till within half a mile of the Eastman farm; then we followed a cart road across the fields.

In a general way we knew the place; and Poley had driven past two or three days previously, and observed all the surroundings carefully. The Eastmans had built a new house the previous season, and had moved into it at New Year's, but the old house had not yet been taken down; it stood about fifty yards down the road from the new one, on the other side.

This old house, now empty, had what is called a bulkhead door, leading into the cellar from the outside at the south end. The bulkhead door was open, and Poley's scheme was—after hanging his May-basket—to hide in the old cellar.

I did not like the idea very well myself at first; but on going down there and striking matches, we discovered under an old bin a good hiding place—even if any one came looking in the cellar with a lamp. For what we most desired was some secure covert hard by, where we could hear our pursuers searching for us and listen to what they said, so as to tell them of it afterwards.

We examined the bin. It was a very large box, and had been turned bottom up; but by lifting one side and supporting it with a prop, we could both creep under, and let it down over us in case we heard any one come to the bulkhead door.

By this time it was nearly 10 o'clock, but there was a light still showing in the sitting room of the new house; and we waited there by the corner of the old house for ten or fifteen minutes for that to go out. Apparently the family had now gone to bed. Everything was very quiet, not a sound anywhere save the distant roar of the brook over the mill-dam. The coast seemed clear and all the omens propitious.

None the less, there were Philistines abroad that night, and I now wonder that we had not been more sharply on the lookout for other boys, there on the same errand as ourselves. Beauty is likely to have more than one admirer.

But after waiting a little longer, we crept up in the lee of the garden fence to the house yard. Poley then shook out the pink and white streamers of his basket, went on tiptoe across the yard to the front door, and attaching

his gift to the door-knob, gave three tremendous knocks and ran.

Almost instantly a window was raised upstairs, and we heard a girl's laugh; the dog in the stable began barking savagely. But we scudded away in cover of the garden fence, and soon were back at the old house and down the bulkhead stairs in that dark cellar. No one seemed to have issued forth. Scoge was still barking inside the stable.

"That's all right!" Poley chuckled. "They won't find us."

But there was a slight noise of the floor creaking in the old house overhead. "Sh!" I whispered. "Somebody's up there."

"I guess not," said Poley. We listened. There certainly was some one up there, and if we had been wise we would have slipped out of that cellar and taken to our heels. We were so mystified, however, that we stood listening.

The next moment the bulkhead door closed with a bang, and exultant voices yelled: "We've got ye! We've got ye! Ye can't get out!" Then we heard stones and bits of timber piled on the door.

"Who is it?" Poley whispered, in vast dismay. "Sounds like Bill Mosher's voice—and he's mad with us!" There appeared to be three of them.

"Hangin' May-baskets to Sel Eastman, aha!" mocked another voice. "You'll catch it! We're goin' to raise a crew, and we'll ride ye on a rail up to the house!"

"That's Luke Robbins. He hates us, too," whispered Poley. "What shall we do?"

What, indeed! Those young wretches who had entrapped us had no doubt come there to hang May-baskets themselves, and were lurking in the old house all the while. And they had gone to raise a crowd! For years there had been no love lost between the boys of our school district and these fellows. And now they had us in their power! There was no knowing what miserable piece of vengeance they might wreak on us.

"What shall we do? Oh, what can we do?" Poley kept saying to me.

"Yes, what shall we do?" said I. "A pretty scrape you've got us into with your May-basket!"

We struck a match and went up the flight of stairs which led to the cellar door inside the house, but found it fast; apparently it was nailed up. That bulkhead door was the only way out of the cellar; and those rogues had piled half a ton of stones on it. The one little high cellar window was banked over with earth outside, the usual winter banking to keep out frost. We were trapped. Really there was nothing we could do—but wait the return of our enemies. There we stood in the dark, listening.

Suddenly there was a little noise outside at the bulkhead door—not at all like the racket and rush we expected when the boys came. I thought at first it was a rat.

Then there was a scraping noise, as if a stone was being slowly and painfully dragged off the bulkhead door.

"There's somebody there," Poley whispered. "Who can it be?"

Then another stone was dragged off, then another, and slowly a larger one, as it seemed.

We stood spellbound, for surely this was not Bill Mosher and his crew!

One by one the stones were dragged and rolled off, each evidently with a great effort; and then the door was lifted up a crack.

We were on the point of dashing at it up the stairs, when a little voice said: "You can get out now—and—thank you for your pretty present," followed instantly by light steps running for the new house.

It was Selma. From her chamber window she had heard something of what had passed, and had come loyally to the rescue.

We were not long getting out of the cellar, but had barely reached the edge of the woodland, across the fields from the house, when we heard the boys bear down on the place. They found the bulkhead door open, and while they stood round in bewilderment, we jeered them exultantly, then sped away for home.—Youth's Companion.

Two Girls with Two Acres.

It is often the case that vegetable growers ship their crop to a large city at a distance, when they could find a better market in some small town nearer home. The Farm Stock Journal tells how two girls have undertaken to supply one such market.

Two bachelor girls of New York and their mother have started an experiment this summer to see if they can actually live from the proceeds of two acres of land. The land is situated on one of the Berkshire hill-tops, near the village of Terryville, not far from Waterbury, Ct. Last summer was the first they spent there, and they sold \$50 worth of garden truck, besides supplying their own table.

This spring they started early. They have plowed and planted the whole two acres, half of it to potatoes. They expect to raise five hundred bushels of potatoes, to sell them for \$1 a bushel, and to clear \$250 or \$300 from that acre. They are now selling hot-bed radishes and lettuce, and have sold one thousand tomato plants raised under cheesecloth from seed planted in April.

The other acre will include a big vegetable garden, a strawberry bed and a scrap of pasture for the horse. Eventually they will have a greenhouse. They keep hens enough to supply their own table. They hired a man to do the plowing and hoe the potatoes. The rest they expect to do themselves.

"I believe," said one of them to the representative of a New York newspaper, "that a great source of modest prosperity is being wasted by the absence of market gardening in the neighborhood of the smaller places. Terryville has about 1300 inhabitants. There is one factory there.

"Before that came it was a farming village. The farms are all there yet, but the farmers are working in the factory. There are no market gardens around it.

"They raise nothing on their farm but hay. They will take a vacation in the summer and go and do their haying, or they will hire a man to do it for them; but as they do nothing for the land the hay crop gets poorer every year.

"At Terryville and Waterbury all the garden truck comes in from New York, and is, of course, expensive and not fresh. With great stretches of uncultivated land all around, the people eat canned vegetables.