



H. Isabel Graham

A
Song
of
December,

And
Other
Poems

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A SONG of December! I'll sing you a song
Of the days dull and transient, the nights cold and long;
When the hills and the valleys are covered with snow,
And the blazing log burns with a clear, steady glow;
When grim, ghostly shadows creep over the wall,
And the time-honored mistletoe hangs in the hall.

Oh! April is fair with the freshness of morn,
A shy, smiling nymph neath the naked boughs born,
The wild roving bee and the wind as they pass
Stir the hyacinth bells and the low, tender grass,
But December ingathers the wealth of the year
In a big, fragrant bundle of peace and good cheer.

A song of December! what month can compare:
When the sleigh-bells fling music and mirth on the air,
Anew the blood tingles and leaps in our veins
As the skaters' shout rings o'er the echoing plains;
Afar we would follow the moon's misty light
Over white, frozen fields or down perilous height.



A Song of
December

The summer is fervid, entrancing and gay,
But rose-wreaths soon wither and flowers fade away,
The dreams so delightful, the twilights of June
Soon pass; like the sound of some rythmical rune,
Frost sears the green leaves, but the lustrous sheen
Of the holly will live through the winter I ween.

A song of December when feuds are forgot;
When far-sundered spirits commingle in thought;
When heart touches heart and the warmth of a hand
Makes the whole of our being and outlook expand;
When the Spirit of Love brooding over the deep
Awakens our souls from their sound, selfish sleep.

A song of December! a song of our King,
Who came to this world such good tidings to bring,
A song of the yule-tide so happy and bright,
A song of the passing year's lingering light;
A song of December! my heart hears it singing
When old friends remember and joy-bells are ringing

THE guid fisher folk, wi' their quaint, hamely lore,
Hae a saying—the like was not told me before—
Sae sweet that it fa's on my soul like a shower
On the wee, wilted face o' some fair, fragile flower;
When the weight o' to-day or to-morrow I feel
I just con it o'er. 'Tis "Love lichtens the creel."



Love Lichtens the Creel



"Love lichtens the creel" when the burden is sair,
An' smooths frae the forehead the furrows o' care.
It sheds a bricht beam on the pathway o' life
That softens the sorrow an' sweetens the strife,
'Tis a minstrel that wanders this weary world roun',
Giving laughter for tears an' a smile for a frown.

Love quickens the pace o' the lame, laggard feet,
An' finds in stern duty a recompense sweet,
It gies o' its best an' asks naething ava,
A hut may haud heaven if love be the law;
A king weel micht covet the herd laddie's meal,
Wi' its scant, simple fare if "Love lichtens the creel."

"Love lichtens the creel"—oh! how joyfu' the thocht!
When misfortune the shade o' oor sheilin' hes socht,
When the wind blaws sae cauld an' the blue o' the sky
Is hid, when the song is exchanged for the sigh,
Nae harm can befall us if lowly we kneel
An' lean on the Love that aye "Lichtens the creel."

Of stream and hamlet bards have sung
And at their feet proud peans flung,
But Memory in her temple still
Enshrines the village on the hill.

Athwart a steeple slightly bent
The sunbeams fall with kind intent,
And goodly dwellings face the street
Enclosed in gardens trim and neat,
Full well I know where violets peep,
And snow-drops waken from their sleep;
Where humming-birds build tiny nest
Upon the lilac's snowy breast.

Near by the kirk behind the mill
I hear the trickling of a rill;
A shady copse invites to rest
Or gather nuts as pleaseth best.

The smithy door stands open still,
And men go in and out at will
To spin a yarn or jocund jest
Or tell which sermon was the best;
The state, the kirk, the crops, the weather,
They each in turn discuss together.



The Village on the Hill

Mark well yon turning to the right,
For soon "God's acre" comes in sight,
Where many a saint from labor rests,
Whose memory is supremely blest;
The road winds slowly round the plot
As if to guard a holy spot,
The broken thorn is bending low
That hid the vestry long ago;
And most who heard the gospel sound
Lie like the old kirk 'neath the ground.
Time reck's not, pastor, people too,
Have passed the pearly portals through.

I follow on as fancy guides
And watch the river as it glides,
A silver thread that scarce is seen
At times among the sedges green,
Then deepening, widening on its way
It curves and shimmers like a bay.

From gypsy camp the smoke upcurled
Gives glimpses of a curious world,
Down through the flats the caravans
Jog on, while prisoned pots and pans
Make mirthful music all the way,
That mingles with the laughter gay;
Unloosed, their horses seek the stream
And men and children lie and dream.

Oft when the sun has sunk to rest,
And day is dying in the west,
I clamber up a bonnie brae
To see the landscape fade away
In smiling meads and homesteads fair,
A poem pastoral and rare.
The sister town with shining towers
Grows spectral in these twilight hours.

Of stream and hamlet bards have sung
And at their feet proud peans flung,
But Memory in her temple still
Enshrines the village on the hill.

'T WAS a Sunday when I saw her
With her brown hair softly curled,
And I thought she was the sweetest
Little girl in all the world ;
'Neath a tuscan trimmed with lilacs
And deep folds of creamy lace,
I could see dark, upturned lashes,
And a pretty, dimpled face.
She was late, the church was crowded,
But she moved along the aisle
With a graceful ease of motion
And a gentle, winning smile ;
And the usher—Heaven bless him—
Didn't know just what to do,
Seats were full, and so he shewed her
Right into our family pew.



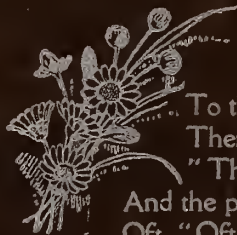
Lilacs

The good rector talked in rapture
Of that home beyond the skies,
But I'd found an earthly Eden
In a pair of hazel eyes
For I handed her a hymn book
When the service first began,
Was Dan Cup'd in the lilacs ?
Through my heart a quiver ran
As I touched her dainty fingers,
I'd seen maidens by the score
Yet my soul had never wakened
To the thrill of love before

But the lesson long is ended
And my eyes with tears are dim,
For the past comes stealing o'er me
With the singing of that hymn,
Still my bride is close beside me
With the lilacs in her hair,
In the happy, merry May-time
All around was green and fair ;
I can see the old trees tossing
Snowy branches to the sky,
How the shadows close around us
As the day goes swiftly by,
Ah ! their fragrance sets me dreaming,
Till my hopes beat high again ;
Till it lifts me to the city
Where the sinless know no pain,
For the godly rector entered
That blest country years ago ;
She is sleeping on the hillside
Where the tall white lilacs grow.



THE songs of the people forever will last ;
 They bind, as with magic, the present and past,
 Like gems firmly fixed in the circlet of time,
 Their radiance illumines each country and clime.
 In castle or cabin, wherever we roam,
 Fond memory reminds us, "There's no place like home."
 Our fancy oft roves by the banks o' the Doon,
 On the braes wi' the wild rose that faded sae soon ;
 Where the birds sing sae blithely, the bright woodbines twine,
 There steals through the stillness the strains o' "Lang Syne."
 We weep o'er the grave by the murmuring stream,
 "Flow gently, sweet Afton, disturb not her dream."
 Through death's desolation and darkness we feel
 A link and a light in "The Land o' the Leal,"
 And many a struggle and sorrowful sigh
 Is silenced to sleep "In the Sweet Bye-and-Bye."
 O' fair "Annie Laurie" we'd fain get a view,
 An' bonnie Maxwellton, where first fa's the dew.
 "By the banks o' Loch Lomon" the singer would stray
 And sob out the sadness in "Auld Robin Gray."
 When the breath from the queens of the garden has flown
 "The Last Rose of Summer" stands blooming alone.
 Not a Scotchman but leaps with new fire to the fray
 At the name of Prince Charlie or wild "Scots, Wha Hae!"



Songs of the People

To the pilgrim afar on the feathery foam
 There rises the thought, "Do they Miss me at Home?"
 "The Exile" still sighs for the Emerald shore,
 And the proud harp of Tara that waketh no more.
 Oft, "Oft in the Stilly Night" tarries he there
 By the lakes and the fells of "Killarney" so fair.
 The old darkey's banjo wakes throbbing with pain
 As his heart sadly turns "Down the Swanee" again.
 Once more he is roaming the cotton fields round
 And grieving for "Massa down in de cold ground."
 "I'se Gwine Back to Dixie," he whispers, some day,
 Where the orange blossoms grow. I must hasten away.
 The rose-covered cabin ne'er fades from his sight
 Where he said to his friends in Kentucky, good-night.
 The sweet shepherd psalm, as it floats o'er the hills,
 Still leads to green pastures and clear, peaceful rills.
 The rod and the staff and the promise ne'er fail
 To strengthen the soul in the shadowy vale.
 We cling to the sure "Rock of Ages" at last
 Till tempest and terror and peril are past.
 There's many a lay of sublime minstrelsy ;
 But the songs of the people are dearest to me.



THERE knelt a monk in cloistered solitude,
His reverent gaze fixed on the sacred rood,
His attitude devout, his soul aflame
With noble impulse and a God-like aim.
A great ambition—to be purged from dross
And changed into the likeness of the cross—
Had led him from the world's gay haunts away
Where he could read and meditate and pray,
His highest hope the blessed Christ to see
And touch the hem of His Divinity.
Morning and evening, passing, found him there,
The midnight hours were spent in secret prayer,
His days in penance, fasting; low he bowed
Before the crucifix, for he had vowed
His prayer unanswered, none should see the face
Or listen to the words of Saint Ignace.
Bright butterflies peered through the grated pane,
The birds sang sweetly down the linden lane,
And children touched the monastery bell
Then started at its melancholy knell.
But Saint Ignace oblivious was to earth,
He counted all its joys of little worth,
For higher things the heart within him pined,
No mortal dreams disturbed his holy mind.
And as he wept and his misdeeds confessed
A benediction breathed within his breast,

*Saint
Ignace
and the
Vision*



From the unseen, some spirit seemed to say,
"Thy prayer is heard, thy wish fulfilled to-day."
His gaunt eyes glowed with new, unnatural fire,
High Heaven had deigned to grant the monk's desire.
He rose, prepared the Eucharist with care
Lest glorious guest should greet him unaware,
Then hurried for the Pontiff's robes of State
And thus attired sat down to watch and wait.
There came a gentle tap upon the door,
A child's voice broke the stillness heretofore,
And pleaded to be fed and taken in.
Her feet were cold, her clothing scant and thin.
But Saint Ignace was busy with his beads
He had no time for others or their needs.
The heavenly vision would appear to him
With early matins or the vespers dim.
But, as the dreary hours dragged by, the place
Grew more deserted, light forsook his face,
The tapers lower burned, he was dismayed,
Why was the vision thus so long delayed?

L'ENVOI

Unhappy monk, thou mayest pray for aye
The answer to thy prayer was sent that day,
It lingered long, then sobbed and turned away.

YE think the world's turned upside down,
An' scuinner at yer ain auld toun,
But gin ye tramp the country roun'
There's aye a something.

There's ifs an' buts when ane wad read,
That sting like some ill-natured weed ;
Gin ye escape, yer charmed indeed,
That dreaded something.

Ye strive an' plan an' lie awake,
An' think nae harm can overtake ;
Next morn' ye find oot yer mistake,
There's aye a something.

Ye meditate an' wonder why
Ilk pot o' ointment hes its fly,
If in the happy by an' by
There maun be something.



There's Aye a Something

There's aye a thorn wi' every rose,
An' wee bit grits among the brose ;
An' ne'er a chiel but sadly knows
There's aye a something.

Say dinna fash yer heid, ye fool,
But tak a seat in wisdom's school
An' learn this guid auld-fashioned rule,
There's aye a something.

Be weel content wi' what ye hae,
An' dinna look sae dour an' wae ;
Dae what ye like, gang whaur ye may,
There's aye a something.

THERE'S a sunny spot that draws me
With a strange and subtle charm,
'Tis the birthplace of my kindred,
The old log house on the farm.
'Mid the hawthorn trees it nestles
In a garden once so bright,
'Twas the tired teamster's haven
And the traveller's delight,
When the ancient, lumb'ring stage coach
Failed its duty to fulfil
All on board found food and shelter
At the log house on the hill.

In its day it was a mansion,
Two full stories, gables grand,
Standing close beside the roadway,
First and foremost in the land;
Proud of its well-hewn timbers
It appeared to look with scorn
On some other lowlier cabin
In a clearance all forlorn ;
For had not the ladies curtsyed
Oft before its oaken sill,
In the minuet so stately,
At the log house on the hill ?

Brave old log house, vainly striving
With the best to hold its own,
Brightened here and there with whitewash,
Solitary, ivy-grown.
Frowned upon by haughty rivals,
Modern in their shape and size,
Naught care they for reverend rafters,
Sad, sweet memories, stifled sighs ;
Wealth they know is fame and power,
All else nowadays is nil,
Ichabod is plainly written
On the log house on the hill.

Drear, deserted, all has vanished
Save the river at its feet,
Gone the happy, smiling faces
Round the hearth that used to meet,
For the little ones have mastered
All the good, old-fashioned R's,
Long they've been in life's fierce battle,
Some are safe beyond the stars ;
Sometimes they come back at even,
In the gloaming, calm and still,
Just to dream that they are children
In the log house on the hill.



The Log House on the Hill

*Clifton Grove,
on the Grand River*



They say people are progressing,
Seems to me they're faster too ;
Folks have so much education
That they can't tell what to do ;
They know more than their Creator
About this world and the next,
Over ologies and isms
They are often sorely vexed ;
But perchance they'd have a better
Knowledge of the mysteries still
If they'd stood the catechising
In the log house on the hill.

'T WAS a glorious night in August
 Just as bright as any noon;
 Shocks of wheat stood round like spectres,
 Starin' at the big red moon.
 All the crickets were a-chirpin';
 When a bullfrog cleared his throat
 Every froglet in the puddle
 Stroved to strike a higher note;
 Far away the hills seemed clambering
 Up to catch the moonbeams shy;
 Pines like pinnacles were pointing
 To the star-lamps lit on high;
 All around was still and silent,
 Not the buzzing of a bee,
 When I chanced to meet with Nancy
 By the yellow apple tree.

Golden apples in her apron,
 Laughing eyes and dimpled face,
 And a smile that, like a sunbeam,
 Brightened up the grim old place;
 Just the sort of girl a fellow
 Wants to buckle to for life,
 If he loves a cozy corner
 And a tender, trustful wife.

I was hired for the harvest,
 Doctor ordered change of air,
 Said I should work out a season
 In a country place somewhere,
 So I laid aside my ledgers,
 Took the train for Sunnylea—
 That was how I met with Nancy
 By the yellow apple tree.

She has never been to college,
 But she knows a great sight more
 Than the educated maidens
 That one meets with by the score,
 For she reads the daily papers
 And the best and latest books;
 Nature tells her lots of secrets
 In deep, shady, sheltered nooks.
 All the little children love her;
 Their expectant hearts are gay
 When she seeks them in the corn-field,
 Or behind the heaps of hay.
 Can you wonder I got startin'
 For the cows right after tea,
 Or a-lingering in the moonlight
 By the yellow apple tree?



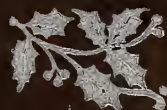
*By the Yellow
 Apple Tree*

This all happened late last summer,
 And I'm back in town again;
 I won't say but what the partin'
 Gave my heart a twinge of pain;
 Somehow I've got tired of tennis,
 Golf don't seem quite in it now,
 And I scarcely see the pretty
 Faces passing when I bow.
 I've no use for lofty ladies,
 Battenburg and furbelows,
 Girls who try to ape their brothers,
 Always hunting after beaux.
 Artless airs an' fancy gingham's
 Plenty good enough for me,
 Long as Nancy's waitin' for me
 By the yellow apple tree.

A wish, a thocht for ane an' a'
On this glad Christmas day
As gathered i' the ancestral ha'
The near and far away

Meet ance again in converse sweet,
While everywhere the bells repeat
A message frae the Mercy Seat.

A
Christmas
Wish



A wish, a thocht for ane an' a'
When ye again maun sever,
May God's guid haun' protect ye a'
An' keep ye safe forever.

Aye lightsome be yer lot an' may
The memory o' this happy day
Shed gowden gleams across yer way.



