



H. Isabel Graham



A Song
of
December

And
Other
Poems

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To Mr. John Duggall
with the compliments
of H. J. ...

Entered according to Act of the Parliament of Canada, in the year one thousand
nine hundred and four, by H. ISABEL GRAHAM, at the Department of Agriculture.

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.

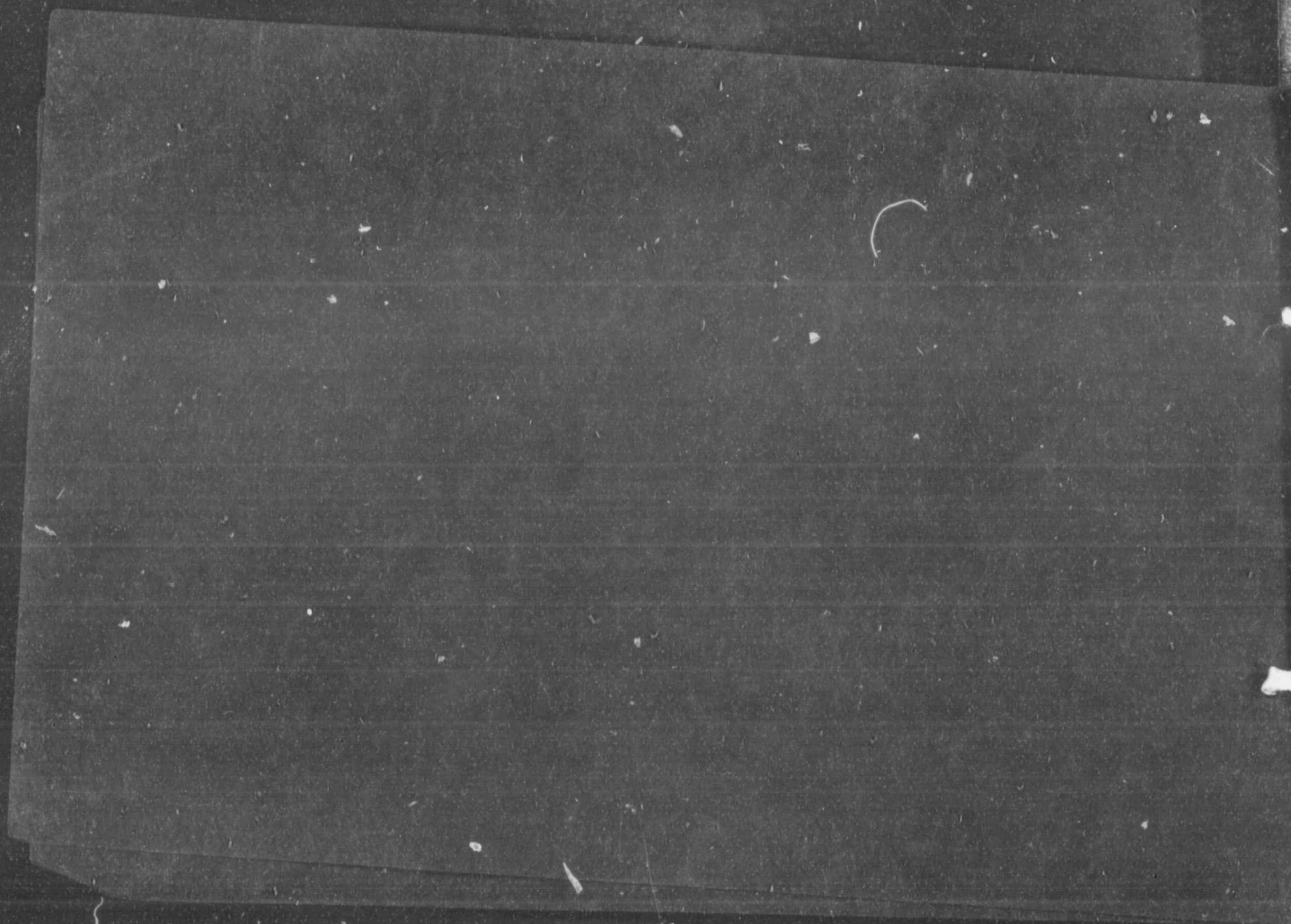


A Song of December

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-da, 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 nicht covet the herd laddie's meal,
Wi' its scant, simple fare if "Love lichtens the creel."

"Love lichtens the creel"—oh! how joyfu' the thoct!
When misfortune the shade o' oor sheelin' hies 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!"



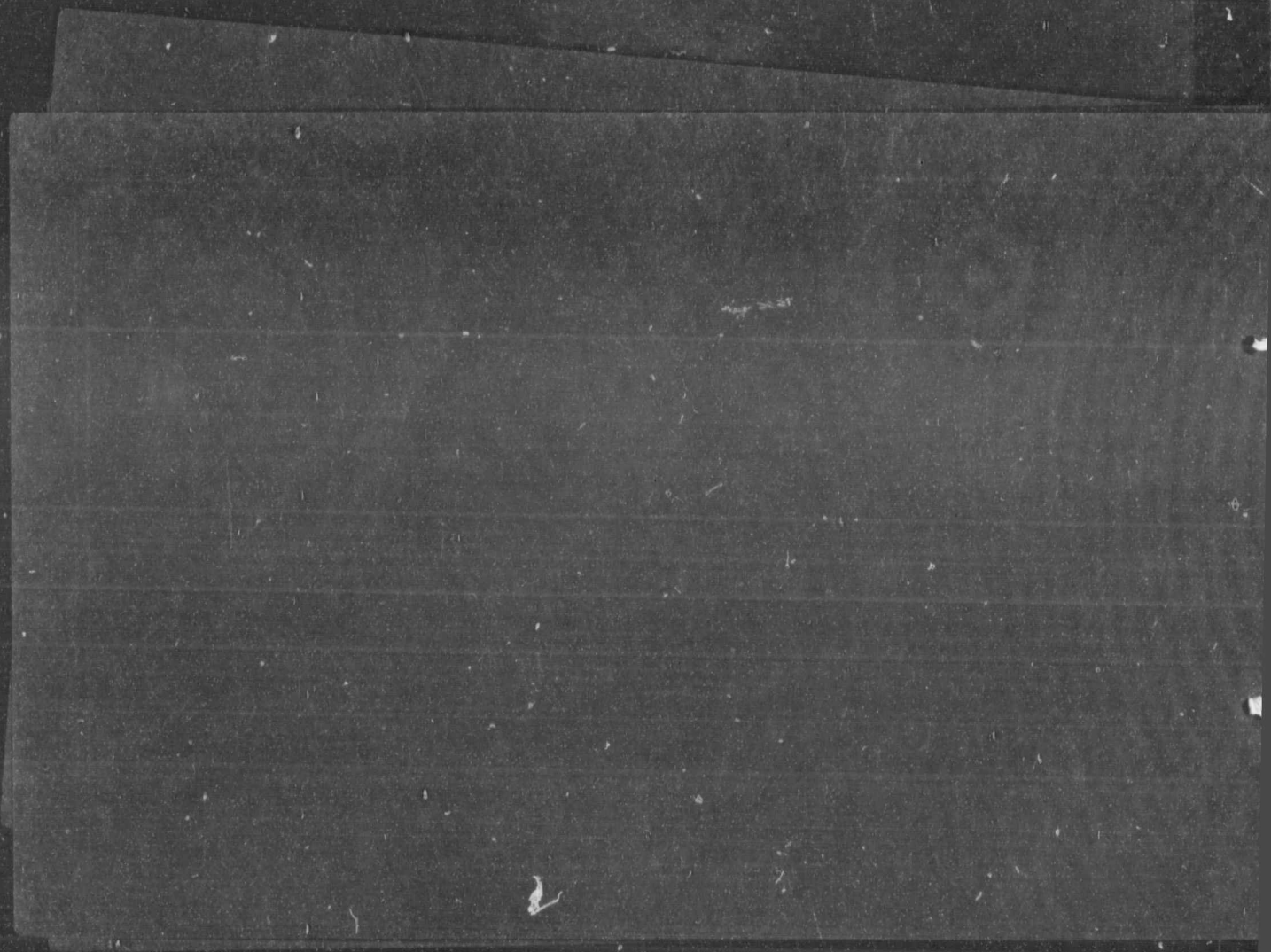
'T WAS a Sunday when I saw her
 With her brown hair softly curled,
 And I thought she was the sweetest
 Little girl in all the world;
 'Neath a tuscan trimmed with lilacs
 And deep folds of creamy lace,
 I could see dark, upturned lashes,
 And a pretty, dimpled face.
 She was late, the church was crowded,
 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.



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 Cupid 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 awakened
 To the thrill of love before.

Lilacs

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 circle 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 mu't 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.

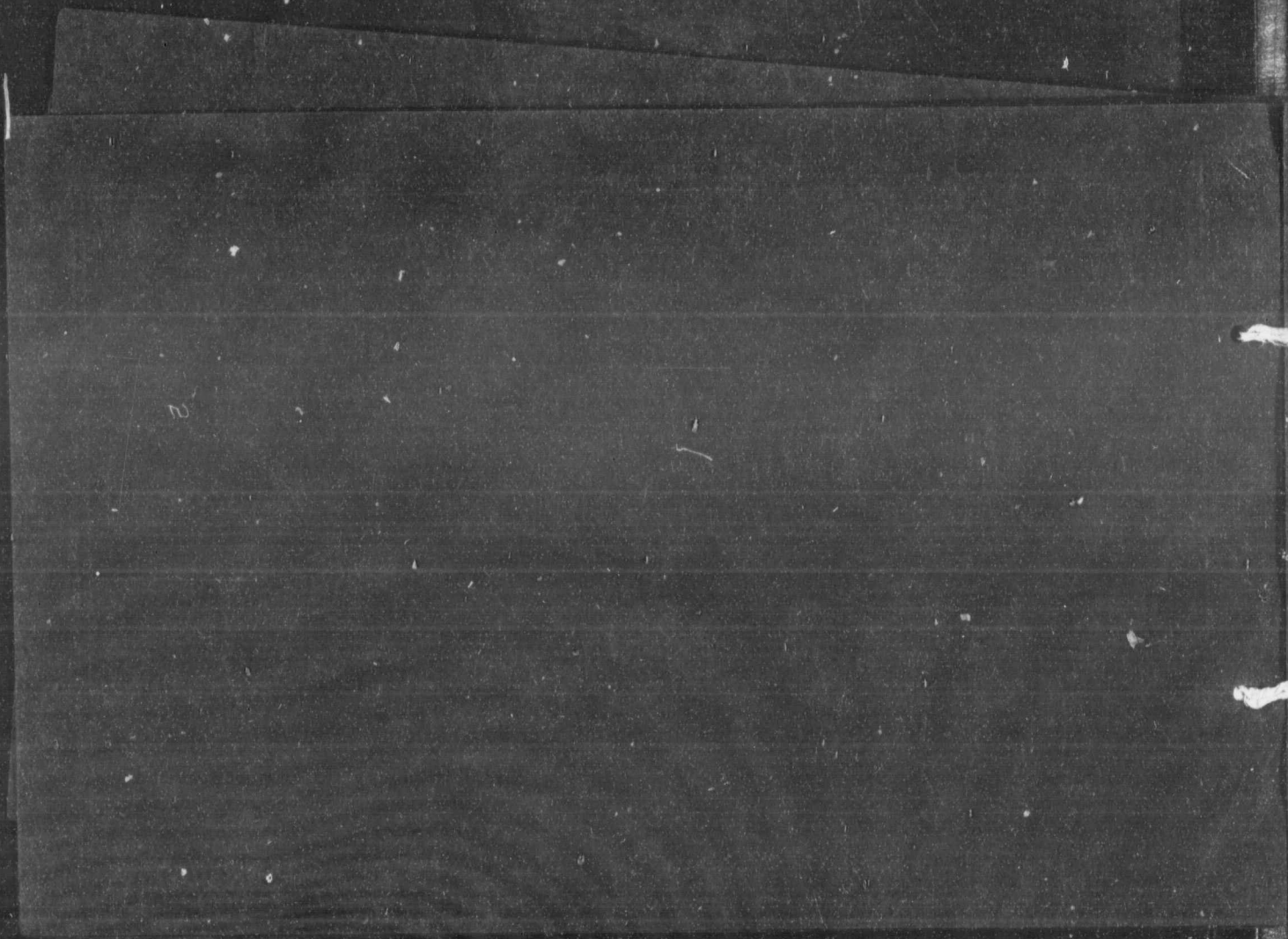
*Saint
 Ignace
 and the
 Vision*



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' scunner 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 he's 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 minut 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.

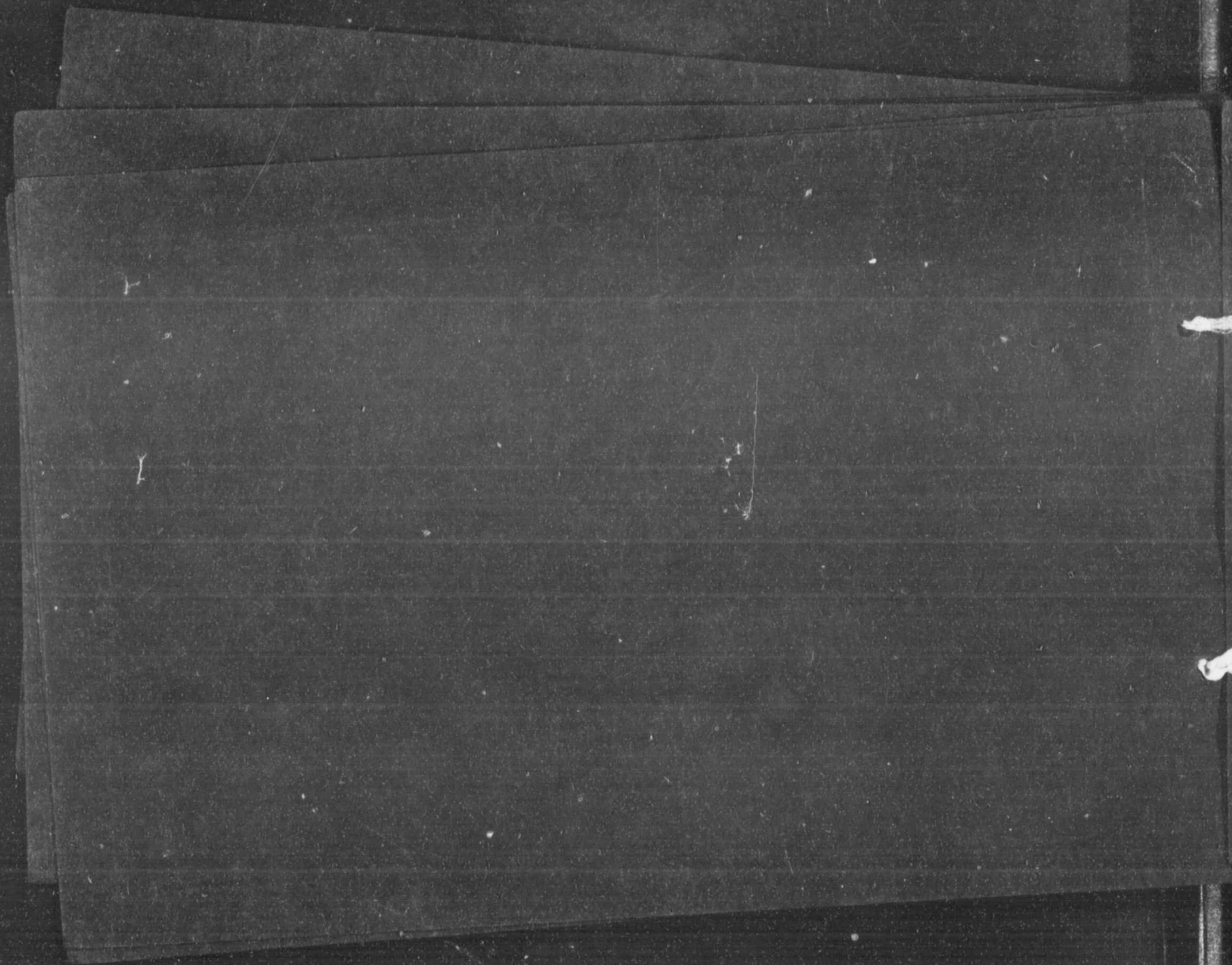


The Log House on the Hill

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
Strove 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.

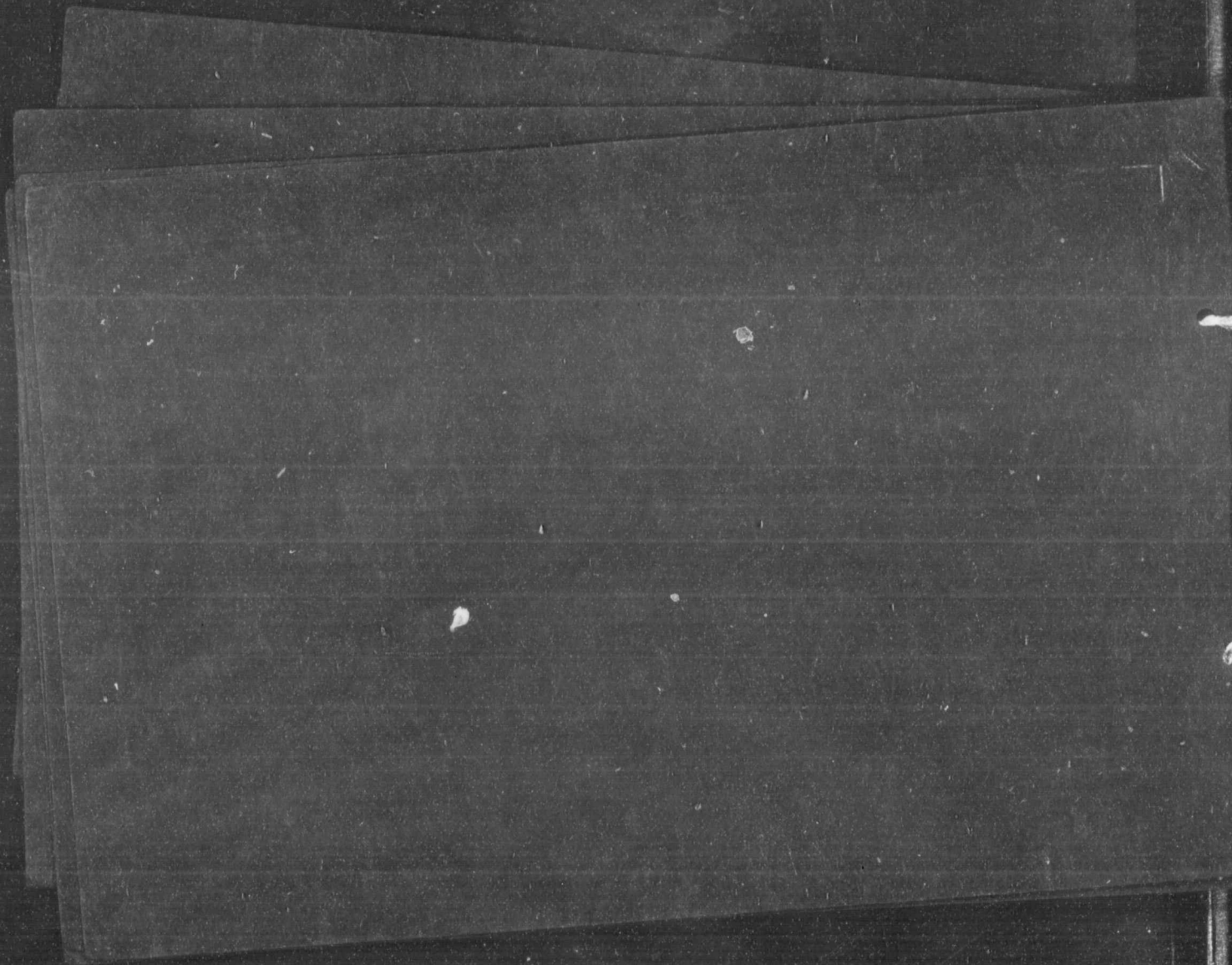
I was hired for the harvest,
Doctor ordered change of air,
Said I should work out a season
In a country place somewhere.
So I laid aside my ledgers,
Took the train for Sunnylea—
That was how I met with Nancy
By the yellow apple tree.

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 pass'ng 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.

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