

**THE PROJECT GUTENBERG eBook OF A CALENDAR OF SONNETS, BY HELEN HUNT JACKSON**

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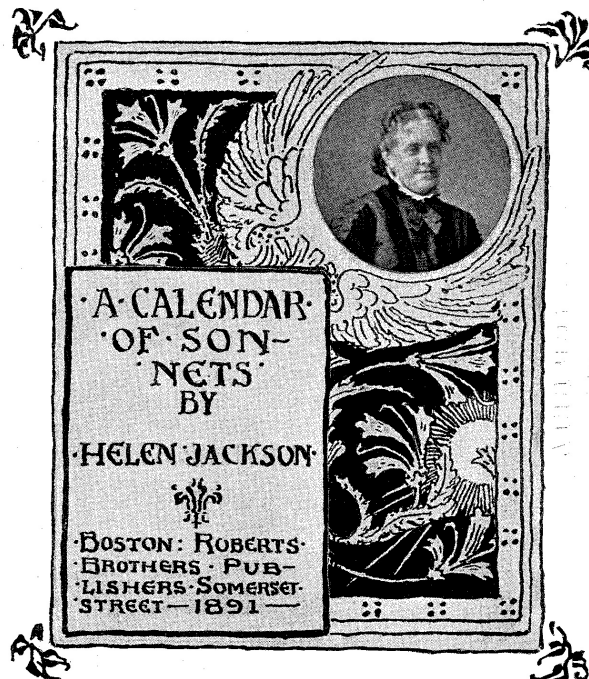
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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A CALENDAR OF SONNETS \*\*\*



**A CALENDAR OF SONNETS**

By

**HELEN JACKSON**

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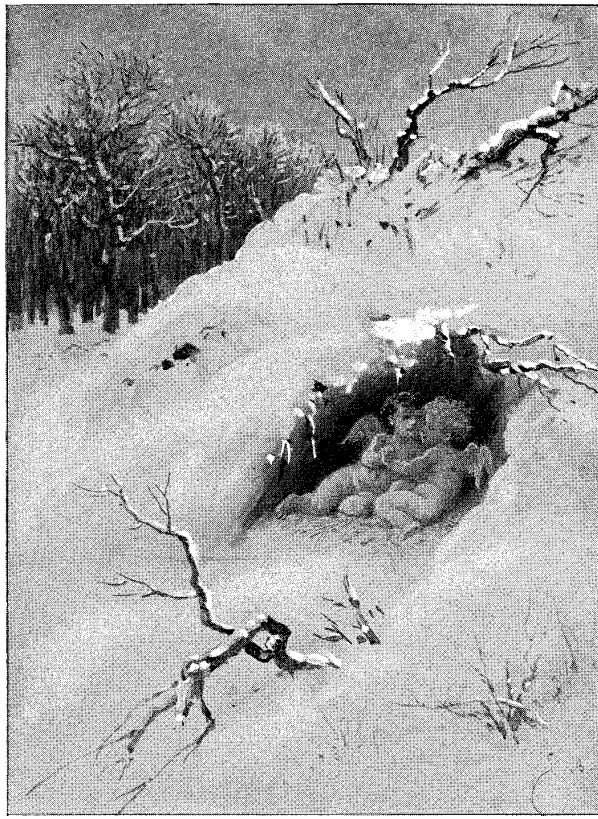
## ILLUSTRATIONS

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O winter! frozen pulse and heart of fire,  
What loss is theirs who from thy kingdom turn  
Dismayed, and think thy snow a sculptured urn  
Of death! Far sooner in midsummer tire  
The streams than under ice. June could not hire  
Her roses to forego the strength they learn  
In sleeping on thy breast. No fires can burn  
The bridges thou dost lay where men desire  
In vain to build.

O Heart, when Love's sun goes  
To northward, and the sounds of singing cease,  
Keep warm by inner fires, and rest in peace.  
Sleep on content, as sleeps the patient rose.  
Walk boldly on the white untrodden snows,  
The winter is the winter's own release.



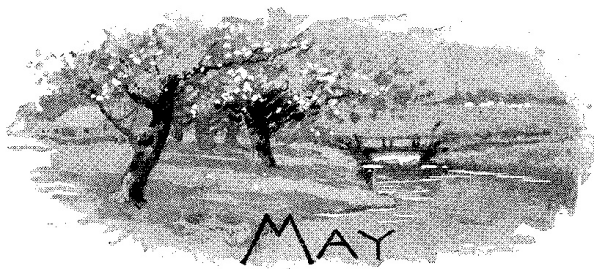
Still lie the sheltering snows, undimmed and white;  
And reigns the winter's pregnant silence still;  
No sign of spring, save that the catkins fill,  
And willow stems grow daily red and bright.  
These are the days when ancients held a rite  
Of expiation for the old year's ill,  
And prayer to purify the new year's will:  
Fit days, ere yet the spring rains blur the sight,  
Ere yet the bounding blood grows hot with haste,  
And dreaming thoughts grow heavy with a greed  
The ardent summer's joy to have and taste;  
Fit days, to give to last year's losses heed,  
To reckon clear the new life's sterner need;  
Fit days, for Feast of Expiation placed!



Month which the warring ancients strangely styled  
The month of war,--as if in their fierce ways  
Were any month of peace!--in thy rough days  
I find no war in Nature, though the wild  
Winds clash and clang, and broken boughs are piled  
At feet of writhing trees. The violets raise  
Their heads without affright, without amaze,  
And sleep through all the din, as sleeps a child.  
And he who watches well may well discern  
Sweet expectation in each living thing.  
Like pregnant mother the sweet earth doth yearn;  
In secret joy makes ready for the spring;  
And hidden, sacred, in her breast doth bear  
Annunciation lilies for the year.



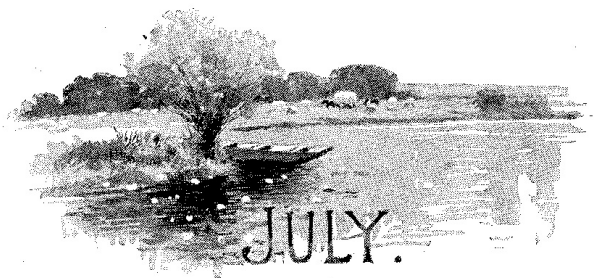
No days such honored days as these! When yet  
Fair Aphrodite reigned, men seeking wide  
For some fair thing which should forever bide  
On earth, her beauteous memory to set  
In fitting frame that no age could forget,  
Her name in lovely April's name did hide,  
And leave it there, eternally allied  
To all the fairest flowers Spring did beget.  
And when fair Aphrodite passed from earth,  
Her shrines forgotten and her feasts of mirth,  
A holier symbol still in seal and sign,  
Sweet April took, of kingdom most divine,  
When Christ ascended, in the time of birth  
Of spring anemones, in Palestine.



O month when they who love must love and wed!  
Were one to go to worlds where May is naught,  
And seek to tell the memories he had brought  
From earth of thee, what were most fitly said?  
I know not if the rosy showers shed  
From apple-boughs, or if the soft green wrought  
In fields, or if the robin's call be fraught  
The most with thy delight. Perhaps they read  
Thee best who in the ancient time did say  
Thou wert the sacred month unto the old:  
No blossom blooms upon thy brightest day  
So subtly sweet as memories which unfold  
In aged hearts which in thy sunshine lie,  
To sun themselves once more before they die.

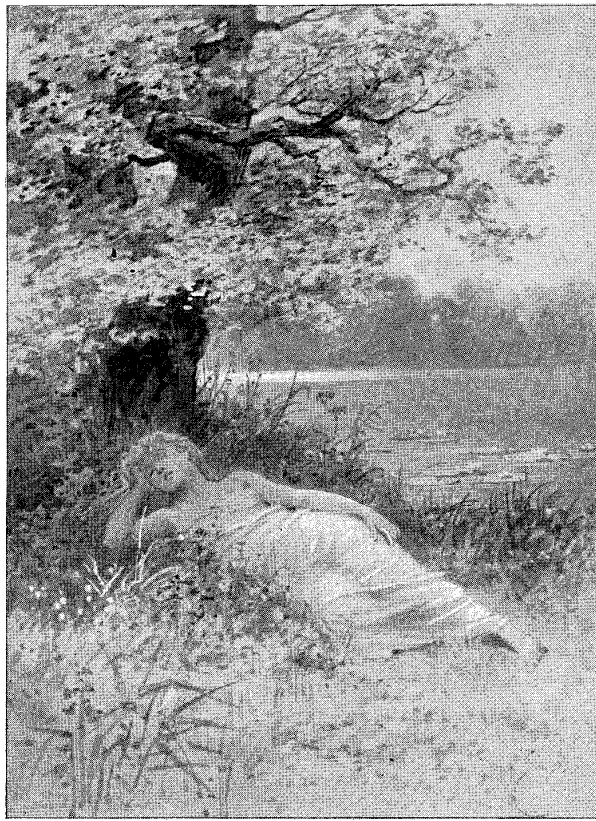


O month whose promise and fulfilment blend,  
And burst in one! it seems the earth can store  
In all her roomy house no treasure more;  
Of all her wealth no farthing have to spend  
On fruit, when once this stintless flowering end.  
And yet no tiniest flower shall fall before  
It hath made ready at its hidden core  
Its tithe of seed, which we may count and tend  
Till harvest. Joy of blossomed love, for thee  
Seems it no fairer thing can yet have birth?  
No room is left for deeper ecstasy?  
Watch well if seeds grow strong, to scatter free  
Germs for thy future summers on the earth.  
A joy which is but joy soon comes to dearth.



Some flowers are withered and some joys have died;  
The garden reeks with an East Indian scent  
From beds where gillyflowers stand weak and spent;  
The white heat pales the skies from side to side;  
But in still lakes and rivers, cool, content,  
Like starry blooms on a new firmament,  
White lilies float and regally abide.  
In vain the cruel skies their hot rays shed;  
The lily does not feel their brazen glare.  
In vain the pallid clouds refuse to share  
Their dews; the lily feels no thirst, no dread.  
Unharm'd she lifts her queenly face and head;  
She drinks of living waters and keeps fair.





Silence again. The glorious symphony  
Hath need of pause and interval of peace.  
Some subtle signal bids all sweet sounds cease,  
Save hum of insects' aimless industry.  
Pathetic summer seeks by blazonry  
Of color to conceal her swift decrease.  
Weak subterfuge! Each mocking day doth fleece  
A blossom, and lay bare her poverty.  
Poor middle-aged summer! Vain this show!  
Whole fields of golden-rod cannot offset  
One meadow with a single violet;  
And well the singing thrush and lily know,  
Spite of all artifice which her regret  
Can deck in splendid guise, their time to go!



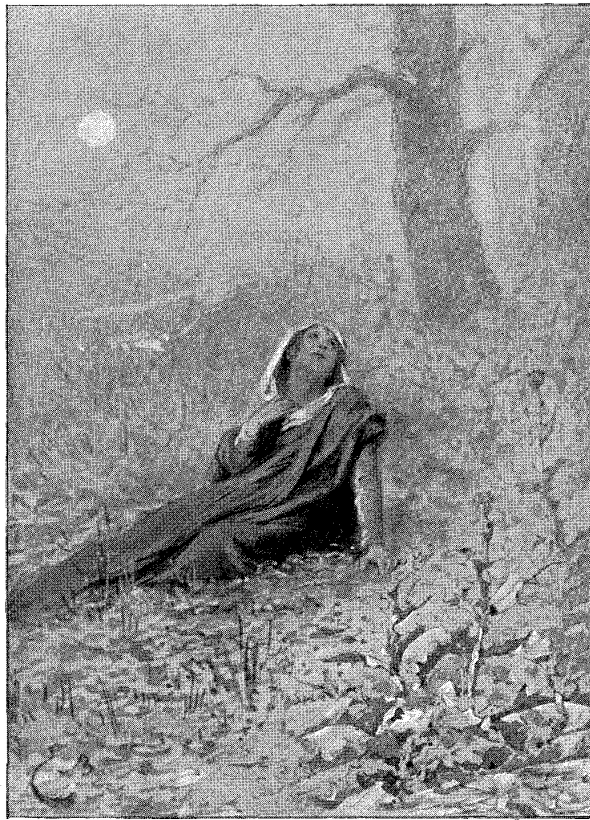
O golden month! How high thy gold is heaped!  
The yellow birch-leaves shine like bright coins strung  
On wands; the chestnut's yellow pennons tongue  
To every wind its harvest challenge. Steeped  
In yellow, still lie fields where wheat was reaped;  
And yellow still the corn sheaves, stacked among  
The yellow gourds, which from the earth have wrung  
Her utmost gold. To highest boughs have leaped  
The purple grape,--last thing to ripen, late  
By very reason of its precious cost.  
O Heart, remember, vintages are lost  
If grapes do not for freezing night-dews wait.  
Think, while thou sunnest thyself in Joy's estate,  
Mayhap thou canst not ripen without frost!



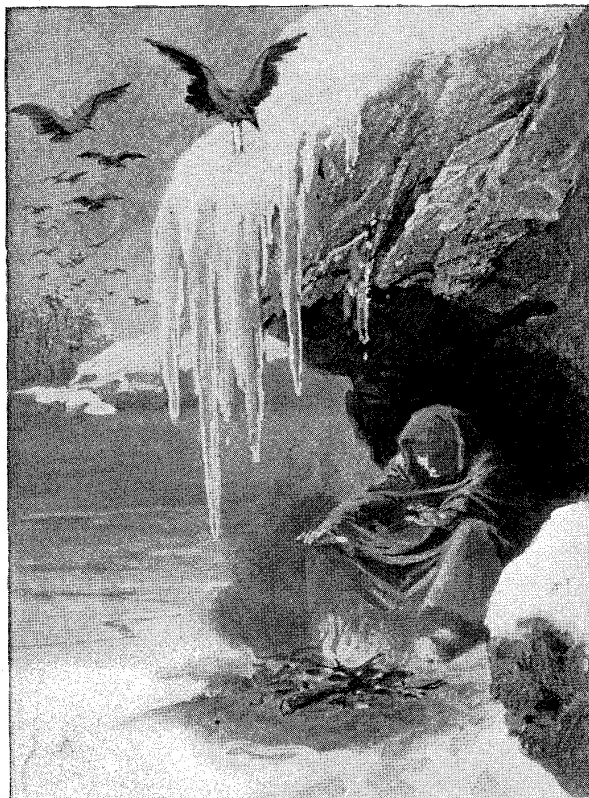
The month of carnival of all the year,  
When Nature lets the wild earth go its way  
And spend whole seasons on a single day.  
The spring-time holds her white and purple dear;  
October, lavish, flaunts them far and near;  
The summer charily her reds doth lay  
Like jewels on her costliest array;  
October, scornful, burns them on a bier.  
The winter hoards his pearls of frost in sign  
Of kingdom: whiter pearls than winter knew,  
Or Empress wore, in Egypt's ancient line,  
October, feasting 'neath her dome of blue,  
Drinks at a single draught, slow filtered through  
Sunshiny air, as in a tingling wine!



This is the treacherous month when autumn days  
With summer's voice come bearing summer's gifts.  
Beguiled, the pale down-trodden aster lifts  
Her head and blooms again. The soft, warm haze  
Makes moist once more the sere and dusty ways,  
And, creeping through where dead leaves lie in drifts,  
The violet returns. Snow noiseless sifts  
Ere night, an icy shroud, which morning's rays  
Will idly shine upon and slowly melt,  
Too late to bid the violet live again.  
The treachery, at last, too late, is plain;  
Bare are the places where the sweet flowers dwelt.  
What joy sufficient hath November felt?  
What profit from the violet's day of pain?



The lakes of ice gleam bluer than the lakes  
Of water 'neath the summer sunshine gleamed:  
Far fairer than when placidly it streamed,  
The brook its frozen architecture makes,  
And under bridges white its swift way takes.  
Snow comes and goes as messenger who dreamed  
Might linger on the road; or one who deemed  
His message hostile gently for their sakes  
Who listened might reveal it by degrees.  
We gird against the cold of winter wind  
Our loins now with mighty bands of sleep,  
In longest, darkest nights take rest and ease,  
And every shortening day, as shadows creep  
O'er the brief noontide, fresh surprises find.



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