

Classic Poetry Series

Helen M. Merrill
- poems -

Publication Date:
2012

Publisher:
Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Helen M. Merrill(1866-1951)

Helen M. Merrill is a daughter of the late Edwards Merrill, County Court Judge, at Picton, Ontario, and Caroline Wright. She was born at Napanee, Ontario, but was educated in the schools of Picton and at Ottawa Ladies College.

Miss Merrill is of French Huguenot extraction, her first American ancestor having landed on this continent in 1633. He was one of the founders of Newbury Port. The family coat-of-arms has the fleur-de-lis on the shield.

Since 1905 Miss Merrill has resided with her mother in Toronto, and for some years has been a member of the staff of the Ontario Bureau of Archives. In this position her work has been of recognized merit. Having made a special study of New Ontario, she has contributed several series of valuable articles, topographical and relating to colonizing conditions, etc., on our great northlands. And in collaboration with Dr. Wilfred Campbell, of Ottawa, she has for some time been gathering material for a historical and genealogical work on the United Empire Loyalists of Canada.

At the Sir Isaac Brock Centenary Commemoration at Queenston Heights, Ontario, she officiated as honorary secretary, and also went through the ceremony of adoption into the Oneida Band of the Six Nations Indians. She was presented with the tribal totem, and was given the Indian name, Ka-ya-tonhs -'a keeper of records.'

Miss Merrill is President of the Canadian Society for the Protection of Birds; Honorary General Secretary of the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada; and a Councillor of the Canadian Defence League. And as a great granddaughter of Dr. J. B. Chamberlain, who emigrated from the United States to Canada, before 1791, she has been elected a member of The Chamberlain Association of America and of The Society of Colonial Families, Boston, Massachusetts.

Since the Great War began, Miss Merrill has interested herself much in collecting funds for the Belgians, and has been appointed by Madame Vandervelde, wife of the Belgian Minister of State, as her representative in Canada for further collections.

Writing

Thomas O'Hagan: "Helen M. Merrill was born to the poetic purple. Her gift as a singer is a genuine one. Her work reveals a mind in close sympathy with nature

whose subtle influence has moulded and fashioned her highest and holiest dreams. Not always is the thought of poetry born poetry -- more frequently is it incarnated in prose, then cradled and clad in the flowers of poetry. The test of true poetry is that it cannot be translated into prose without doing violence to its spirit. Now it will be found that Miss Merrill's poetry measures up to this test. It is thought, born on the mountain top and clad in the most fitting raiment."

A Hill Song

THERE is a little hint of spring,
A subtle, silent, unseen thing
By shadowed wall and open way,
And I, a gypsy for the day,
Go straying far beneath the sky,
And far into the windy hills,
Where distant, dim horizons lie,
And earth with gleams of heaven fills.

My quest is but a singing bird,
Whose voice on uplands lone is heard,
And this my path where none hath been,
And this my tent, an evergreen;
The hills are mine own open way—
I hate the smother of the town—
I love by breezy hills to stray,
Where thawing streams come leaping down.

Oh, joy it is and free of care,
With the sun and the wind in my face and my hair,
Alone with the shining clouds which trail
Silently each like a phantom sail,
Over the hills, on the blue of heaven;
Oh, joy it is to wander here,
Where the wilding heart of the young, sweet year,
Quickens the earth, and spring is near!

And joy it is, the shorelark's cry—
Full well I know he walketh by;
A sudden winnow of grey wings,
And in the light he soars and sings,
And pausing in his heavenward flight,
A heart-beat, on from height to height,
He trails his silver strains of song
By paths eye may not follow long;
Grey glimpses in the azure fade,
I only hear sweet sounds in the skies
As if the soul of song had strayed
Invisible from paradise.

Helen M. Merrill

Bluebirds

O MAGIC music of the Spring,-
Across the morning's breezy meads
I hear the south wind in the reeds,
I hear the golden bluebirds sing.

O mellow music of the morn,-
Across the fading fields of Time
How many joyous songs are borne
From memory's enchanting clime.

I see the grasses shine with dew,
The cornflowers gleaming in the grain,
And, oh! the bluebirds sing-and you?
We fare together once again.

O haunting music of the dusk,
When silent birds are on the wing
And sweet is scent of pine and musk-
Oh, as we wander hand in hand
Across the shadow-painted land,
I hear the golden bluebirds sing!

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In Arcadie

THE sea is green, the sea is grey,
The tide winds blow, and shallows chime;
Where earth is rife with bloom of May
The throstle sings of lovers' time,
Of violet stars in lovers' clime.
Love fares to-day by land and sea,
On the horizon's utmost hill
The mystic blue-flower beckons still
Beneath the stars of Arcadie.

Love fares to-day, and deftly builds
To melodies of wind and leaves;
Castles in Spain yet brightly gilds,
And song of star and woodbird weaves,
And flowers, and pearl and purple eves.
With roofs of ever-changing skies
And fretted walls with time begun,
Its portals open to the sun,
On dream-held hills a castle lies.

No proud armorial bearings now,
But God's white seal on every leaf;
No sapphire gleaming on my brow,
Deep in my heart a dear belief;
No grey unrest, no pain, no grief.
By day a forest green and fair,
Where veeries sing in secret bowers
And lindens blow and little flowers,
And bluebirds cleave the shining air.

By night a quiet wayside grove
Where Aldebaran lights the gloom,
And silent breezes idly rove
Above a shadow-painted room
Builded of many a bough and bloom—
A wafted air of myrrh and musk,
The music of slow falling streams,
A whitethroat singing in its dreams,
And thou beside me in the dusk

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Sandpipers

MORNING on the misty highlands,
On the outer shining islands;
Gulls their grey way seaward winging
To the blinking zones of blue;
South winds in the shallows singing
Where I wander far with you,
Little pipers, careless, free,
On the sandlands by the sea.

All day, on the amber edges
Of the pools and silver ledges
Of the sedgelands in the sun,
Restlessly the pipers run—
Weet, a-weet, a-weet, a-weet!
Sun and wind and sifting sand,

Joy of June on sea and land—
Weet, a-weet, a-weet, weet weet!

Evening on the fading highlands,
On the outer amber islands;
Grey wings folded in the sedges,
In the glimmer of a star
Where the lamps of Algol are
Shining on a world's white edges.

Moonlight on the sombre forelands,
On the outer, silver shorelands;
Peaceful mists that pale and drift
Seaward like a phantom fleet,
Through a sapphire, shadowed rift.

Weet, a-weet, a-weet, weet weet!
Night, and stars, and empty hushes,
Darkness in the purple rushes—
Weet, a-weet, a-weet, weet weet!

When The Gulls Come In

WHEN the gulls come in, and the shallow sings
Fresh to the wind, and the bell-buoy rings,
And a spirit calls the soul from sleep
To follow over the flashing deep;

When the gulls come in from the fields of space,
Vagrants out of a pathless place,
Waifs of the wind that dip and veer
In the gleaming sun where the land lies near,-

Long they have wandered far and free,
Bedouin birds of the desert sea;
God only marked their devious flight,
God only followed them day and night,-

Sailor o' mine, when the gulls come in,
And the shallow sings to the bell-buoy's din,
Look to thy ship and thy gods hard by,
There's a gale in the heart of the golden sky.

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