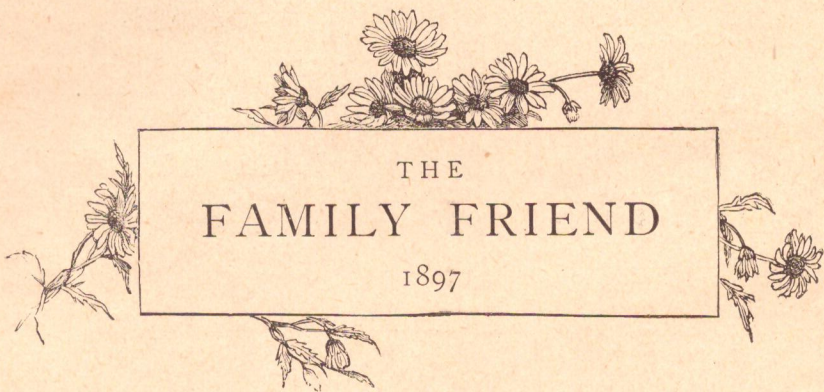


1st Prize for Drawing  
Senior Department

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Dec. 1903





THE  
FAMILY FRIEND

1897





A QUEEN OF THE SNOW-TIME.



.. THE ..

# Family Friend

AND

## MOTHERS' COMPANION.

A Magazine for the Home Circle.

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Volume XXVIII.—1897.

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### Principal Contributors :

**Authors**—REV. S. BARING-GOULD, MARIE ZIMMERMANN, REV. W. PIERCE, THOMAS CHAMPNESS, F. M. HOLMES, REV. JOSEPH PARKER, D.D., CHARLES EDWARDES, DR. GORDON STABLES, E. M. WATERWORTH, REV. E. J. HARDY, M.A., F. SCARLETT POTTER, ALFRED THORNLEY, F.L.S., ISABELLA FYVIE MAYO, ROBERT RAE, etc.


**Artists**—RAYMOND POTTER, WILLIAM RAINEY, R.I., A. FAIRFAX MUCKLEY, H. GIACOMELLI, W. J. WEBB, R. H. BROCK, PERCY TARRANT, FRED. H. ANDREWS, N. PRESCOTT DAVIES, W. H. MARGETSON, etc.

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London :

S. W. PARTRIDGE & CO.,

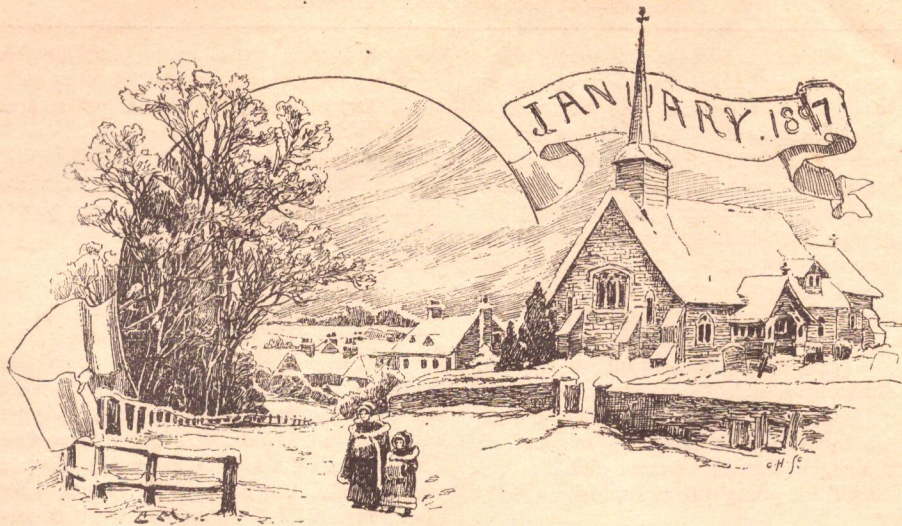
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**A** WELCOME give to the dawning year,  
As it opens for us once more!  
What does it hold—  
Silver or gold?  
What treasure has it in store?

To the dawning year a carol sing,  
Of the Love that casteth out fear!  
Whate'er it be,  
'Tis Heaven's decree.  
God grant a Happy New Year!

A. LEA.

## LADY CROOME'S SECRET.

BY MARIE ZIMMERMANN, AUTHOR OF "A WOMAN AT BAY," ETC.

### CHAPTER I.—JOHANNA.

NCE more, and in farewell, Johanna and her solemn husband went the length of the Linden Walk, outside the ancient Mecklenburg town, where, these hundred years and more, her people had dwelt and toiled. To-morrow—save as a cherished memory—the old gabled houses, the hilly ways, the lakes and orchards, and wide, dim linden lanes would be no more. Yesterday a burgher's daughter in plain house gown and apron; to-day a great lady going to a grand new home over the sea.

A few months ago, while winter winds yet blew, Sir Nicholas Croome, of Croome Court, Croomewold, Kent, had come to the town of Parzeran, in Mecklenburg, to see his scientific comrade, Professor Schwartz, and at a birthday party at the latter's house, had met this Gretchen of girls. Upon inquiry, the Englishman, whom Johanna's mild charms had overcome, was told that she was the only child of worthy Karl Heucke, the wood merchant, whose business at that moment was on the verge of bankruptcy. Other meetings occurred. Friend Schwartz spoke with enthusiasm of the girl. She had five languages at her tongue's end, he declared. There was no maiden so wise, so sweet, so beloved in the town.

Sir Nicholas was well pleased to hear this. Johanna's placid, flower-like looks were just to his taste, and though he counted forty-six to her twenty-five years, he did not think any the worse of himself for that. Johanna, who was of fairy make, and below ordinary stature, had her father's slow and gracious ways, and

the flaxen plaits of the Heucke women, said the native gossips, but along with these the dark, eloquent eyes of that foreign mother, whose name was never breathed in the family hearing.

Johanna's suitor—a tall, lean individual with frigid, light blue eyes, and punctilious manner—had not always been the possessor of a fine estate and rent roll. Some years ago, at a certain university, he was plain Professor Croome, familiarly known amongst his disciples as "Old Parchment"—a man, however, who had the respect of his associates, if he did, at times, incur a touch of their ridicule.

Sir Nicholas, whose will was as law to the grateful father—whom, by the way, he had saved from social ruin, and even self-destruction—had decided that Johanna must go to England with him as his wife, and arranged to stay with friend Schwartz while the marriage clothes were made ready.

A few weeks later—the couple being yet little more than strangers—there ensued a quiet wedding at St. Michael's Church, by the Linden Walk, and the Englishman and his sweet bride betook themselves to a brief holiday jaunt through Switzerland.

Now, after a placid honeymoon among the old mountains, they have returned to the homestead, that Johanna may bid good-bye to the dear Väterchen—the like of whom among fathers surely never was!—before departing for that distant marriage home.

Poor Väterchen! he was inconsolable. His pipe went out; food and drink went begging these days of coming separation. Its shadow was upon Johanna as she thoughtfully loitered for the last time in the dear old linden lane. They were stepping from the Walk to the cobble-stoned ways beyond, homeward bound,



when Sir Nicholas solemnly addressed his young wife :

"Before we go indoors I have something to say to you, my dear Johanna," he observed. He never used her pet name, *Hannchen*, as her father did. A certain frostiness permeated the whole individuality of the man, and he was not a lover such as the poetic Johanna would, under ordinary circumstances, have chosen; but this comparative stranger, for whose learning and virtues she had the sincerest respect, had a claim upon her consideration, which no other man could ever advance. To him, under Heaven, she owed her father's life.

"You know, of course, that I have been a widower these many years past," Sir Nicholas went on gravely. "I told your father this, and he undertook to inform you. There is, however, one point on which I have been silent when I should have spoken. Johanna," he continued, after a slight pause, "I have a child."

"A child!" cried the young wife rapturously. "Ah, I will love it!"

He looked ever so blank at this. "You forget that my wife died many years ago," he said. "My daughter is twenty-three."

"Twenty-three! You have a daughter who is twenty-three?" cried Johanna, with dismay. "Why have you not spoken of this before, my dear Nicholas?"

"I meant to do so," answered the husband, "and can hardly explain why I did not. I told your father on the day of our marriage, and he then advised me to delay the communication."

"But this daughter! she dwells with you—yes?" said the wife, after a troubled pause.

"Of course."

"How is she named, Professor?" asked Johanna, giving him his scholarly title, as she often did from hearing Herr Schwartz so speak of him.

"Victoria. She is a charming and exemplary person, and I am sure you will like her. I wrote yesterday and gave her all due particulars, and I anticipate a cordial welcome both for my fair companion and myself."

"Has she not known, then, of our marriage," asked Johanna, with consternation, "until now?"

"No; I thought one letter should suffice," answered her husband, who seemed to make no more of bringing home a wife, after twenty years or so of widowhood, than he would of setting a new table among his household goods. But that was just Sir Nicholas's way. Outside his own erudite line, he was the densest of men; hick-skinned himself, he would make scant allowance for the susceptibilities of others.

Johanna hung dejectedly on her lord's arm. The light of her wifehood, so newly kindled, seemed suddenly quenched. Words were few and far between as they returned to the old house.

Arrived home, for the last time they sat down to the simple *Abendbrod*. The housefather had his dish of buttermilk, Johanna her chocolate and cake, in which her husband—the most austere of feeders, joined her.

The daughter rose presently. *Väterchen* held her, oh, so close! He had but the one; he was to lose her on the morrow.

"I have no other child, and she will be far from me," said the merchant, when the door had closed upon Johanna. "Deal well with her, my son."

"I will indeed," answered the Englishman. "Have

no fear, Herr Heucke, as to your daughter's future."

"I believe you, my son, but the time was short," said the father, anxiously. "You know each other not as you should do."

"Quite so," observed Sir Nicholas, with his frigid little smile, "but we are admirably suited to each other. I am not a cantankerous person, and your daughter is amiability itself."

*Väterchen* puffed solemnly at his pipe.

"The Johanna is an angel," said he, "till you anger her. Then the lightnings shoot forth."

"Lightnings!" echoed Sir Nicholas, blankly.

"Yes, my friend, lightnings. Anger her, and they fly at you from her eyes. Ah, she has a soul of fire, has the Johanna. Listen, my son," said the father, and with that he laid down his long pipe, and harangued the Englishman on the subject of his daughter's peculiar mental make, concluding with minute directions as to the treatment likely to produce the best results.

Sir Nicholas was utterly astonished. A soul of fire! lightnings! from this dulcet little lady, whose dove's airs were her crowning charm. It was preposterous; mentally the Englishman, who had no more imagination than an icicle, pooh-poohed the very idea. The foreign mother might account for a few irregularities—if such there were—but his wife had no mental disadvantage, he was sure, that would mar their well-being.

Sir Nicholas had heard this and that of the lost wife. The truth, as he got it from friend Schwartz, was that years ago Karl Johann Heucke had made holiday abroad, and succumbed to the flashing charms of an Italian peasant maiden, Lucia, a very dream of grace and loveliness.

Seven years passed, when one day when there had been rumours in the town of a swarthy stranger flaunting here and there, Karl Heucke's wife was missing, and the tale ran that she and the said stranger had departed, alas! together. The same day the husband disappeared. His business affairs were given into the hands of a trusty friend, and for some months the Mecklenburgers saw him no more.

One morning, haggard, unkempt, seeming years older, he returned. "I have no wife," he said harshly, in answer to his friend's inquiries. "She is no more. Henceforth let none speak her name to me."

And from that day none did. How or where she had died was never known. The painting the proud husband had made shortly after the birth of the child Johanna was thrust, face to the wall, into the garret, and Karl Heucke took up his widower's life.

His one comfort was his little daughter Johanna, who never tired of ministering to the bereaved man. Eternal, like his sorrow, was her love. Deep in her heart there lived another passion, however, of which her father dreamed not—the love of the beautiful mother she had lost—and to sit before the banished picture in the attic, and dream of what might have been, was ever one of the tenderest pleasures of Johanna's girl-life. To her that lost mother was all that was good and true—she adored her memory. In this wise had the young daughter acquired totally false ideas, and unhappily fostered that hyperfervid turn of mind, which her solitary habits and a prodigal consumption of poetry and romance had already made unduly prominent.