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A LOVER'S DIARY

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 1.

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INTRODUCTION

'A Lover's Diary' has not the same modest history as 'Embers'. As far back as 1894 it was given to the public without any apology or excuse, but I have been apologising for it ever since, in one way—without avail. I wished that at least one-fifth of it had not been published; but my apology was never heard till now as I withdraw from this edition of A Lover's Diary some twenty-five sonnets representing fully one-fifth of the original edition. As it now stands the faint thread of narrative is more distinct, and

redundancy of sentiment and words is modified to some extent at any rate. Such material story as there is, apart from the spiritual history embodied in the sonnets, seems more visible now, and the reader has a clearer revelation of a young, aspiring, candid mind shadowed by stern conventions of thought, dogma, and formula, but breaking loose from the environment which smothered it. The price it pays for the revelation is a hopeless love informed by temptation, but lifted away from ruinous elements by self-renunciation, to end with the inevitable parting, poignant and permanent, a task of the soul finished and the toll of the journey of understanding paid.

The six sonnets in italics, beginning with 'The Bride', and ending with 'Annunciation', have nothing to do with the story further than to show two phases of the youth's mind before it was shaken by speculation, plunged into the sadness of doubt and apprehension, and before it had found the love which was to reveal it to itself, transform the character, and give new impulse and direction to personal force and individual sense. These were written when I was twenty and twenty-one years of age, and the sonnet sequence of 'A Lover's Diary' was begun when I was twenty- three. They were continued over seven years in varying quantity. Sometimes two or three were written in a week, and then no more would be written for several weeks or maybe months, and it is clearly to be seen from the text, from the change in style, and above all in the nature of the thought that between 'The Darkened Way', which ends one epoch, and 'Reunited', which begins another and the last epoch, were intervening years.

The sonnet which begins the book and particularly that which ends the book have been very widely quoted, and 'Envoy' has been set to music by more than one celebrated musician. Whatever the monotony of a sonnet sequence (and it is a form which I should not have chosen if I had been older and wiser) there has been a continuous, if limited, demand for the little book. As Edmund Clarence Stedman said in a review, it was a book which had to be written. It was an impulse, a vision, and a revealing, and, in his own words in a letter to me, "It was to be done whether you willed it or no, and there it is a truthful thing of which you shall be glad in spite of what you say."

These last words of the great critic were in response to the sudden repentance and despair I felt after Messrs. Stone and Kimball had published the book in exquisite form with a beautiful frontispiece by Will H. Low. In any case, it is now too late to try and disabuse the minds of those who care for the little piece of artistry, and since 1894, when it was published, I have matured sufficiently in life's academy not to be too unduly sensitive either as to the merit or demerit of my work. There is, after all, an unlovable kind of vanity in acute self-criticism —as though it mattered deeply to the world whether one ever wrote anything; or, having written, as though it mattered to the world enough to stir it in its course by one vibration. The world has drunk deep of wonderful literature, and all that I can do is make a small brew with a little flavour of my own; but it still could get on very well indeed with the old staple and matured vintages were I never to write at all.

The King—Whence art thou, sir?

Gilfaron—My Lord, I know not well.

Indeed, I am a townsman of the world.

For once my mother told me that she saw
The Angel of the Cross Roads lead me out,
And point to every corner of the sky,
And say, "Thy feet shall follow in the trail
Of every tribe; and thou shalt pitch thy tent
Wherever thou shalt see a human face
Which hath thereon the alphabet of life;
Yea, thou shalt spell it out e'en as a child:
And therein wisdom find."

The King—Art thou wise?

Gilfaron—Only according to the Signs.

The King—What signs?

Gilfaron—The first—the language of the Garden, sire, When man spoke with the naked searching thought, Unlacquered of the world.

The King-Speak so forthwith; come, show us to be wise.

Gilfaron—The Angel of the Cross Roads to me said:

"And wisdom comes by looking eye to eye,
Each seeing his own soul as in a glass;
For ye shall find the Lodges of the Wise,
The farthest Camp of the Delightful Fires,
By marching two by two, not one by one."

—The King's Daughter.

THE VISION

As one would stand who saw a sudden light Flood down the world, and so encompass him And in that world illumined Seraphim Brooded above and gladdened to his sight;

So stand I in the flame of one great thought, That broadens to my soul from where she waits, Who, yesterday, drew wide the inner gates Of all my being to the hopes I sought.

Her words come to me like a summer-song, Blown from the throat of some sweet nightingale; I stand within her light the whole day long,

And think upon her till the white stars fail: I lift my head towards all that makes life wise, And see no farther than my lady's eyes.

ABOVE THE DIN

Silence sits often on me as I touch Her presence; I am like a bird that hears A note diviner than it knows, and fears To share the larger harmony too much.

My soul leaps up, as to a sudden sound A long-lost traveller, when, by her grace, I learn of her life's sweetness face to face, And sweep the chords of sympathies profound.

Her regal nature calmly holds its height Above life's din, while moving in its maze. Unworthy thoughts would die within her sight,

And mean deeds creep to darkness from her gaze. Yet only in my dreams can I set down
The word that gives her nobleness a crown.

LOVE'S COURAGE

Courage have I to face all bitter things, That start out darkly from the rugged path, Leading to life's achievement; not God's wrath Would sit so heavy when my lady sings.

I did not know what life meant till I felt Her hand clasp mine in compact to the end; Till her dear voice said, "See, I am your friend!" And at her feet, amazed, my spirit knelt.

And yet I spoke but hoarsely then my thought, I groped amid a thousand forces there; Her understanding all my meaning caught,

It was illumined in her atmosphere. She read it line by line, and then there fell The curtain on the shrine-and it is well.

LOVE'S LANGUAGE

Just now a wave of perfume floated up To greet my senses as I broke the seal Of her short letter; and I still can feel It stir me as a saint the holy cup.

The missive lies there,—but a few plain words: A thought about a song, a note of praise, And social duties such as fill the days Of women; then a thing that undergirds

The phrases like a psalm: a line that reads-"I wish that you were coming!" Why, it lies Upon my heart like blossoms on the skies,

Like breath of balm upon the clover meads. The perfumed words soothe me into a dream; My thoughts float to her on the scented stream.

ASPIRATION

None ever climbed to mountain heights of song, But felt the touch of some good woman's palm; None ever reached God's altitude of calm, But heard one voice cry, "Follow!" from the throng.

I would not place her as an image high Above my reach, cold, in some dim recess, Where never she should feel a warm caress Of this my hand that serves her till I die.

I would not set her higher than my heart,— Though she is nobler than I e'er can be; Because she placed me from the crowd apart,

And with her tenderness she honoured me. Because of this, I hold me worthier To be her kinsman, while I worship her.

THE MEETING

O marvel of our nature, that one life Strikes through the thousand lives that fold it round, To find another, even as a sound Sweeps to a song through elemental strife!

Through cycles infinite the forces wait, Which destiny has set for union here; No circumstance can warp them from their sphere; They meet sometime; and this is God and Fate.

And God is Law, and Fate is Law in use, And we are acted on by some deep cause, Which sanctifies "I will" and "I refuse,"

When Love speaks—Love, the peaceful end of Laws. And I, from many conflicts over-past, Find here Love, Law, and God, at last.

THE NEST

High as the eagle builds his lonely nest Above the sea, above the paths of man, And makes the elements his barbican, That none may break the mother-eagle's rest;

So build I far above all human eyes My nest of love; Heaven's face alone bends down To give it sunlight, starlight; while is blown A wind upon it out of Paradise.

None shall affright, no harm may come to her, Whom I have set there in that lofty home: Love's eye is sleepless; I could feel the stir

E'en of God's cohorts, if they chanced to come. I am her shield; I would that I might prove How dear I hold the lady of my love. WHEN thou makest a voyage to the stars, go thou blindfolded; and carry not a sword, but the sandals of thy youth.

—Egyptian Proverb.

SEEK thou the Angel of the Cross Roads ere thou goest upon a journey, and she will give thee wisdom at the Four Corners.

—Egyptian Proverb.

PISGAH

Behold, now, I have touched the highest point In my existence. When I turn my eyes Backward to scan my outlived agonies, I feel God's finger touch me, to anoint

With this sweet Present the ungenerous Past, With love the wounds that struck stark in my soul; With hope life's aching restlessness and dole; To show me place to anchor in at last.

Like to a mother bending o'er the bed Where sleeps, death-silent, one that left her side Ere he had reached the flow of manhood's tide,

So stood I by my life whence Life had fled. But Life came back at Love's clear trumpet-call, And at Love's feet I cast the useless pall.

LOVE IS ENOUGH

It is enough that in this burdened time
The soul sees all its purposes aright.
The rest—what does it matter? Soon the night
Will come to whelm us, then the morning chime.

What does it matter, if but in the way One hand clasps ours, one heart believes us true; One understands the work we try to do, And strives through Love to teach us what to say?

Between me and the chilly outer air Which blows in from the world, there standeth one Who draws Love's curtains closely everywhere,

As God folds down the banners of the sun. Warm is my place about me, and above Where was the raven, I behold the dove.

AT THE PLAY

I felt her fan my shoulder touch to-night. Soft act, faint touch, no meaning did it bear To any save myself, who felt the air Of a new feeling cross my soul's clear sight.

To me what matter that the players played! They grew upon the instant like the toys Which dance before the sight of idle boys; I could not hear the laughter that they made.

Swept was I on that breath her hand had drawn, Through the dull air, into a mountain-space, Where shafts of the bright sun-god interlace,

Making the promise of a golden dawn. And straightway crying, "O my heart, rejoice!" It found its music in my lady's voice.

SO CALM THE WORLD

Far up the sky the sunset glamour spreads, Far off the city lies in golden mist; The sea grows calm, the waves the sun has kissed Strike white hands softly 'gainst the rocky heads.

So calm the world, so still the city lies, So warm the haze that spreads o'er everything; And yet where, there, Peace sits as Lord and King, Havoc will reign when next the sun shall rise.

The wheels pause only for a little space, And in the pause they gather strength again. 'Tis but the veil drawn over Labour's face,

O'er strife, derision, and the sin of men. My heart with a sweet inner joy o'erflows To nature's peace, and a kind silence knows.

THE WELCOME

But see: my lady comes. I hear her feet Upon the sward; she standeth by my side. Just such a face Raphael had deified, If in his day they two had chanced to meet.

And I, tossed by the tide of circumstance, Lifting weak hands against a host of swords, Paused suddenly to hear her gentle words Making powerless the lightnings of mischance.

I, who was but a maker of poor songs, That one might sing behind his prison bars, I, who it seemed fate singled out for wrongs—

She smiled on me as smile the nearest stars. From her deep soul I draw my peace, and thus, One wreath of rhyme I weave for both of us.

THE SHRINE

Were I but as the master souls who move In their high place, immortal on the earth, My song might be a thing to crown her worth,— 'Tis but a pathway for the feet of Love.

But since she walks where I am fain to sing, Since she has said, "I listen, O my friend!" There is a glory lent the song I send, And I am proud, yes, prouder than a king.

I grow to nobler use beneath her eyes— Eyes that smile on me so serenely, will They smile a welcome though my best hope dies,

And greet me at the summit of the hill? Will she, for whom my heart has built a shrine, Take from me all that makes this world divine?

THE TORCH

Art's use what is it but to touch the springs Of nature? But to hold a torch up for Humanity in Life's large corridor, To guide the feet of peasants and of kings!

What is it but to carry union through Thoughts alien to thoughts kindred, and to merge The lines of colour that should not diverge, And give the sun a window to shine through!

What is it but to make the world have heed For what its dull eyes else would hardly scan, To draw in a stark light a shameless deed,

And show the fashion of a kingly man! To cherish honour, and to smite all shame, To lend hearts voices, and give thoughts a name!

IN ARMOUR,

But wherein shall Art work? Shall beauty lead It captive, and set kisses on its mouth? Shall it be strained unto the breast of youth, And in a garden live where grows no weed?

Shall it, in dalliance with the flaunting world, Play but soft airs, sing but sweet-tempered songs? Veer lightly from the stress of all great wrongs, And lisp of peace 'mid battle-flags unfurled?

Shall it but pluck the sleeve of wantonness, And gently chide the folly of our time? But wave its golden wand at sin's duress,

And say, "Ah me! ah me!" to fallow crime? Nay, Art serves Truth, and Truth with Titan blows, Strikes fearless at all evil that it knows.

IN THEE MY ART

In thee is all my art; from thee I draw
The substance of my dreams, the waking plan
Of practised thought; I can no measure scan,
But thou work'st in me like eternal law.

If I were rich in goodly title deeds Of broad estate, won from posterity; If from decaying Time I snatched a see Richer than prelates pray for with their beads;

If some should bring before me frankincense, And make a pleasant fire to greet mine eyes; If there were given me for recompense

Gifts fairer than a seraph could devise: I would, my sovereign, kneel to thee and say, "It all is thine; thou showedst me the way."

DENIAL

But is it so that I must never kiss Thee on the brow, or smooth thy silken hair? Never close down thine eyelids with Love's prayer, Or fold my arms about my new-found bliss?

Must I unto the courses of my age Worship afar, lest haply I profane The temple that is now my holy fane, For which my song is given as a gage?

Shall I who cry to all, "Come not within The bounds where I my lady have enshrined; I am her cavalier"; shall I not win

One dear caress, the rich exchequer find Of thy soft cheek? If thou command, my lips Shall find surcease but at thy fingertips.

TESTAMENT

Why do I love thee? Shall my answer run: Because that thou hast beauty, noble place, Because of some sweet glamour in thy face, And eyes that shame the clear light of the sun?

Shall I exclaim upon thy snow-white hands, Challenge the world to show a gentler mien, Call down the seraphs to attest, the sheen Upon thy brow is borrowed from their lands?

Shall I trace out a map of all thy worth, Parcel thy virtues, say, "For this and this I learned to love her; here new charms had birth;

I in this territory caught a bliss"? Shall I make inventory of thy grace, And crowd the total into common space?

CAPTIVITY

Nay, lady, though I love thee, I make pause Before thy question, and know naught to say; Art cannot teach me to define the way, Love led me, nor e'en register Love's cause.

It can but blazon in this verse of mine What love does for me; what from Love it gains; What is its quickening; but it refrains From divination where thy merits shine.

Canst thou, indeed, not tell what wrought in thee To bring me as a captive to thy feet?

Canst thou not say, "'Twas this that made decree

Of conquest; here thy soul with mine did meet?" Or is it that both stand amazed before The shrine where thou hast blessed and I adore?

O MYSTIC WINGS

O mystic wings, upbear me lightly now, Beyond life's faithful labour to a seat Where I can feel the end of things complete, Where no hot breath of ill can scorch the brow.

O mystic wings of Art, about thee Truth Makes atmosphere of purity and power; 'Tis man's breath kills the spring's soft-petaled flower—

Ye give a refuge for the heart of youth.

Ye give a value for all loss in age, When feebled eyes search for forgotten springs; Ye fan the breeze that turns the moulded page,

And carry back the soul to ardent things. Poor payment can I give, but here engage I thee to be Love's airy equipage.

WAS IT THY FACE?

Was it thy face I saw when, as a child, Night after night I watched one quiet star Shine 'tween my curtain and the window-bar Until I slept, and made my sleep more mild?

Was it thy influence outreaching then To me, o'er untrod years, o'er varying days, To give me courage, as from phase to phase Of youth's desires I passed to deeds of men?

Was it because the star was hid awhile, That I in blindness wandered from my path; That I wooed Folly with her mumming smile,

And sought for Lethe in a cup of wrath? Another hand touched mine with sadness there, And saved me till I saw thy face appear.

A WOMAN'S HAND

A woman's hand. Lo, I am thankful now That with its touch I have walked all my days; Rising from fateful and forbidden ways, To find a woman's hand upon my brow;

Soft as a pad of rose-leaves, and as pure

As upraised palms of angels, seen in dreams: And soothed by it, to stand as it beseems A man who strives to conquer and endure.

A woman's hand!—there is no better thing Of all things human; it is half divine; It hath been more to this lame life of mine,

When faith was weakness, and despair was king. Man more than all men, Thou wast glad to bless A woman's sacrifice and tenderness.

ONE FACE I SEE

One face I see by thine whene'er I hold Converse with things that are or things that were; Whene'er I seek life's hidden folds to stir, And watch the inner to the outer rolled.

Dost thou not know her, O beloved one? Hast thou not felt her sunshine on thy face? In me hast thou not learned some signs to trace Of that dear soul who calleth me her son?

Such as I was that in thy countenance Found favour, from her it was gathered most. To my mad youth her gentle surveillance

Was like a watch-fire on a rock-bound coast. She drew about me motherhood, and thou Hast with Love's holy chrism touched my brow.

MOTHER

She gave me courage when I weakly said, "O see how drifting, derelict, am I!
The tide runs counter, and the wind is high; I see no channel through the rocks ahead.

My arm is impotent; what worth to trim
The bending sails! Look, I shall quaff a cup
To Fate, while the wild ocean swallows up
The shipwrecked youth, the man who lives in him."

She said: "But thou hast valour, dear, too much For such as this; thou hast grave embassy, Given with thy birth; would'st thou thine honour smutch

With coward failing? Dear son, breast the sea." Firm-purposed from that hour, through wind and wave,

WHEN FIRST I SAW THEE

When first I saw thee, lady, straightway came The thought that somehow, somewhere, destiny, Through blinding paths of happiness or blame, Would bend my way of life, my soul to thee.

But then I put it from me: was not I A wanderer? To-morrow I should be In other lands-beside another sea; Nay, you were but a star-gleam in my sky.

And so I came not in your sight awhile, You gave no thought, and I passed not away; But like some traveller in a deep defile

I walked in darkness even through the day: Until at last the hands of Circumstance Pointed the hour that waked me from my trance.

THE FATES LAUGH

I did not will this thing. I set my face Towards duty and my art; I was alone. How knew I thou shouldst roll away the stone From hopes long buried, by thy tender grace?

What does it matter that we make resolve? The Fates laugh at us as they sit and spin; We cannot tell what Good is, or what Sin, Or why old faiths in mist of pain dissolve.

We only can stand watchful in the way, Waiting with patient hands on shield and sword, Ready to meet disaster in the fray,

Till Time has struck the letters of one word— Word of such high-born worth: triumphant Love, Give me thy canopy where'er I rove.

AS ONE WHO WAITETH

As one who waiteth for the signet ring Of his dear sovereign, that his embassy May have clear passport over land and sea, And make the subject sacred as his king;

As waits the warrior for a pontiff's palm, Upraised in blessing o'er his high emprise; And bows his mailed forehead prayerful-wise, Sinking his turbulency in deep calm:

So waited I for one seal to be set Upon my full commission, for a sign That should make impotent man's "I forget,"

And make God's "I remember" more divine: Which should command at need the homage of The armed squadrons of all loyal love.

THE SEALING

But yestermorn my marshalled hopes were held Upon the verge of august pilgrimage; To-day I am as birds that leave the cage To seek green fastnesses they knew of eld;

To-day I am as one who hides his face Within his golden beaver, and whose hand Clenches with pride his tried and conquering brand, Ay, as a hunter mounted for the chase.

For, see: upon my lips I carry now A touch that speaks reveille to my soul; I have a dispensation large enow

To enfold the world and circumscribe each pole. Slow let me speak it: From her lips and brow I took the gifts she only could endow.

THE PLEDGE

O gifts divine as any ever knew The noble spirits of an antique time; As any poets fashion in their rhyme, Or angels whisper down the shadeless blue!

The priceless gifts of holy confidence, That speak through quivering lips from heart to heart; That unto life new energies impart, And open up the gates of prescience.

O dear my love, I unto thee have given Pledge that I am thy vassal evermore; I stand within the zenith of my Heaven,

On either hand a starred eternal shore I have come nearer to thy greater worth, For thou hast raised me from the common earth.

LOVE'S TRIBUTARIES

I can say now, "There was the confluence Of all Love's tributaries; there the sea Of Love spread out towards eternity; And there my coarser touched her finer sense.

Poor though I am in my own sight, I know That thou hast winnowed, sweet, what best I am; Upon my restlessness thy ample calm Hath fallen as on frost-bound earth the snow.

It hideth the harsh furrows that the wheels Of heavy trials made in Life's champaign; Upon its pure unfolding sunshine steals,

And there is promise of the spring again. Here make I proclamation of my faith, And poise my fealty o'er the head of Death."

THE CHOICE

If Death should come to me to-night, and say: "I weigh thy destiny; behold, I give
One little day with this thy love to live,
Then, my embrace; or, leave her for alway,

And thou shalt walk a full array of years; Upon thee shall the world's large honours fall, And praises clamorous shall make for all Thy strivings rich amends." If in my ears

Thou saidst, "I love thee!" I would straightway cry, "A thousand years upon this barren earth Is death without her: for that day I die,

And count my life for it of poorest worth." Love's reckoning is too noble to be told By Time's slow fingers on its sands of gold.

RECOGNITION

As in a foreign land one threads his way 'Mid alien scenes, knowing no face he meets; And, hearing his name spoken, turns and greets With wondering joy a friend of other days;

As in the pause that comes between the sound And recognition, all the finer sense Is swathed in a melodious eloquence, Which makes his name seem in its sweetness drowned

So stood I, by an atmosphere beguiled Of glad surprise, when first thy lips let fall The name I lightly carried when a child,

That I shall rise to at the judgment call. The music of thy nature folded round Its barrenness a majesty of sound.

THE WAY OF DREAMS

Since I rose out of child-oblivion I have walked in a world of many dreams, And noble souls beside the shining streams Of fancy have with beckonings led me on.

Their faces oft, mayhap, I could not see, Only their waving hands and noble forms. Sometimes there sprang between quick-gathered storms, But always they came back again to me.

Women with smiling eyes and star-spun hair Spake gentle things, bade me look back to view The deeds of the great souls who climbed the stair

Immortal, and for whom God's manna grew: Dante, Anacreon, Euripides, And all who set rich wine upon the lees.

THE ACCOLADE

Men of brave stature came and placed their hands Upon my head, and, lifting shining swords, Drew through the air signs mightier than words, And vanished in the sun upon the sands.

Glimpses I caught of faces that have come Through crowding ages; whisperings of songs;

And prayers for the redress of human wrongs From voices that upon the earth are dumb.

They were but shadows, but they lent me joy; They gave me reverence for all who pace The world with hands raised, evil to destroy,

Who live but for the honour of their race. They taught me to strike at no idol raised, Worshipped a space, then left to be dispraised.

FALLEN IDOLS

Stedfastness, shall we find it, then, at all? Is it that as the winds blow north and south, So must be praises from the loud world's mouth, Which on its heroes in their glory fall?

Because the voice grows stiller, or the arm No longer can beat evils back; because The shoulders sink beneath new-rising cause, And the fine thought has lost its moving charm;

Because of these shall puny sages shake Their heads, and haste to mock the failing one, Who in his strength could make the nations quake;

Prophet like Daniel, King like Solomon! In this full time we have seen mockers run About the throne of such as Tennyson.

TENNYSON

Who saith thy hand is weak, King Tennyson? Who crieth, See, the monarch is grown old, His sceptre falls? Oh, carpers rude and bold, You who have fed upon the gracious benison

Scattered unstinted by him, do you now Dispraise the sweet-strung harp, grown tremulous 'Neath fingers overworn for all of us? You cannot tear the laurels from his brow.

He lives above your idle vaunts and fears, Enthroned where all master souls stand up In their high place, and fill the golden cup,

God-blest for kings, with wine of endless years, And greet him one with them. O brotherhood Of envious dullards, ye are wroth with good.

THE ANOINTED ONES

Why, let them rail! God's full anointed ones Have heard the world exclaim, "We know you not." They who by their souls' travailing have brought Us nearer to the wonder of the suns.

Yet, who can stay the passage of the stars? Who can prevail against the thunder-sound? The wire that flashes lightning to the ground Diverts, but not its potency debars.

So, men may strike quick stabs at Caesar's worth,— They only make his life an endless force, 'Scaped from its penthouse, flashing through the earth,

And 'whelming those who railed about his Gorse. Men's moods disturb not those born truly great: They know their end; they can afford to wait.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A LOVER'S DIARY, VOLUME 1 ***

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