

**EMBERS A
LOVER'S DIARY**

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Embers a lover's diary by Gilbert Parker

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GILBERT PARKER

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LOVER'S DIARY**

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GILBERT PARKER

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GILBERT PARKER

EMBERS
A LOVER'S DIARY



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A LOVER'S DIARY

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INTRODUCTION

I HAD not intended that *Embers* should ever be given to the public, but friends whose judgment I respect have urged me to include it in the subscription edition at least, and with real reluctance I have consented. It was a pleasure to me to have one piece of work of mine which made no bid for pence or praise; but if that is a kind of selfishness, perhaps unnecessary, since no one may wish to read the verses, I will now free myself from any chance of reproach. This much I will say to soothe away my own compunctions, that the book will only make the bid for popularity or consideration with near a score of others, and not separately, and that my responsibility is thus modified. The preface to *Embers* says all that need be said about a collection which is, on the whole, merely a book of youth and memory and impressionism in verse. At least it was all spontaneous; it was not made to order on any page of it, and it is the handful left from very many handfuls destroyed. Since the first edition (intended only for my personal friends) was published I have written "Rosleen," "Where Shall We Betake Us?" "Granada," "Mary Callaghan and Me," "The Crowning" (on the Coronation of King Edward VII), the fragment "Kildare" and "I Heard the Desert Calling"; and I have also included others like "The Tall Dakoon" and "The Red Patrol," written over twenty years ago. "Mary Callaghan and Me" has been set to music by Mr. Max Müller, and has made many friends, and "The Crowning" was the Coronation ode of *The People*, which gave a prize, too ample I think, for the best musical setting of the lines. Many of the other pieces in *Embers* have been set to music by distinguished composers

like Sir Edward Elgar, who has made a song-cycle of several, Sir Alexander Mackenzie, Mr. Arthur Foote, Mrs. Amy Woodforde Finden, Robert Somerville, and others. The first to have musical setting was "You'll Travel Far and Wide," to which in 1895 Mr. Arthur Foote gave fame as "An Irish Folk Song." Like "O Flower of All the World," by Mrs. Amy Woodforde Finden, it has had a world of admirers, and such singers as Mrs. Henschel helped to make Mr. Foote's music loved by thousands, and conferred something more than an ephemeral acceptance of the author's words.

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 re-

veal 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 *Envy* 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 to 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.