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LEAVES FROM THE DIARY OF AN AGED SPINSTER.

The poet of THE EARLY par excellence, hath written two lines which run thus—

"Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

Now, I never can think of these lines, but they remind me of the tender, delicate, living, breathing, and neglected flowers that bud, blossom, shed their leaves, and die, in cold unsunned obscurity. Flowers that were formed to shed their fragrance round a man's heart and to charm his eye, but which, though wandering melancholy and alone in the wilderness where they grow, he passeth by them with neglect, making a companion of his loneliness. But, to drop all metaphor, where will you find a flower more interesting than a spinster of three score and ten, of sixty, of fifty, or of forty? They have, indeed, "wasted their sweetness on the desert air." Some call them "old maids," but it is a malicious appellation, unless it can be proved that they have refused to become wives. I would always take the part of a spinster,—they are a peculiar people, far more "sinned against, than sinning." Every blockhead thinks himself at liberty to crack a joke upon them; and when he says something that he conceives to be wonderous smart about Miss Such-an-one and her cat, or poodle dog, he conceives himself a marvelous clever fellow; yea, even those of her own sex, who are below what is called a "certain age," (what that age is, I cannot tell,) think themselves privileged to giggle at the expense of their elder sister. Now, though there may be a degree of peevishness (and it is not to be wondered at) amongst the sisterhood, yet with them you will find the most sensitive tenderness of heart a delicacy that quivers like the aspen leaf at a breath, and a kindliness of soul, that a mother might envy—or rather for envy, shall I imitate? But ah! if their history were told, what chronicle would it exhibit of blighted affections, withered hearts, secret tears, and midnight sighs!

The first spinster of whom I have a particular remembrance, as belonging to her caste, was Diana Darling. It is now six and twenty years ago since Diana paid the debt of nature, up to which period, and for a few years before she rented a room in Cairnside. It was only a year or two before her death that I became acquainted with her, and I was then very young. But I never shall forget her kindness towards me. She treated me as though I had been her own child, or rather grandchild, for she was then very little under seventy years of age. She had always an air of gentility about her; people called her "a betterish sort o' body." And although *Miss* and *Mistress* are becoming general appellations now, twenty or thirty years ago, upon the Borders, those titles were only applied to particular persons, or on particular occasions, and whether their more frequent use now, is to be attributed to the schoolmaster being abroad, or the dancing-master being abroad, I cannot tell, but Diana Darling, although acknowledged to be a "betterish sort o' body," never was spoken of by any other term but "ould Diana," or "ould Die." Well do I remember her flowing chintz gown, with short sleeves, her snow white apron, her whiter cap, and old kid gloves reaching to her elbows; and as well do I remember how she took one of the common blue cakes which washerwomen use, and tying it up in a piece of woolen cloth, dipped it in water, and daubed it round and round the walls of her room, to give them the appearance of being papered. I have often heard of and seen *stencding* since, but never as the attempt was, I am almost persuaded that Diana was the first who put it in practice. To keep up gentility, putteth people to strange shifts, and often to ridiculous ones,—and to both of these extremities she was driven. But I have hinted that she was a kind-hearted creature; and above all, do I remember her for the fine old ballads which she sang to me; but there was one that was an especial favorite with her and a verse of which, if I remember correctly, ran thus—

"Fy Lizzy Lindsay!
Sae fause in the morning ye be,
Mair fit ye was helping your minny
To milk a' the ewes and the kye."

Diana, however, was a woman of some education, and to a relative, she left a sort of history of her life, from which the following is an extract:—

My father died before I was eighteen, (so began Diana's narrative,) and he left five of us, that is, my mother, two sisters, a brother, and myself, five hundred pounds apiece. My sisters were both younger than me, but within six years after our father's death they both got married; and my brother, who was only a year oulder than myself, left the house also, and took a wife, so that there was nobody but me and my mother left. Every body thought there was something very singular in this, for it was not natural that the youngest should be taken and the ouldest left; and besides, it was always acknowledged, that I was the best-favored and the best tempered in the family, and there could be no dispute but that my sister was as good as theirs.

I must confess, however, that when I was but a lassie o' sixteen, I had drawn up wi' one James Laidlaw—but I should score out the word *one*, and just say that I had drawn up wi' James Laidlaw. He was a year, or may be three, oulder than me, and I kenned him when he was just a laddie at Mr. Wh—'s school in Punse; but I took no notice o' him then in particular, and indeed I never did, until one day that I was an errand down by Kimmerghame, and I met James just coming out frae the gardens. It was the summer season, and he had a posie in his hand, and a very bonny posie it was. "Here's a fine day Diana," says he. "Yes it is," says I.

So we said nae mair for some time, but he keepit walking by my side, and at last he said—"What do you think o' this posie?" "It is very bonny James," said I. "I think sae," quoth he, "and if ye will accept it, there should nacbody be mair welcome to it." "Oh, I thank ye," said I, and I blushed in a way, "why should ye gie me it?" "Never mind," says he, "take it for ould acquaintance sake—we were at the school together."

So I took the flowers, and James keepit by my side, and cracked to me a' the way to my mother's door, and I cracked to him—and I really wondered that the road between Kimmerghame and Dunse had turned sae short. It wasna half the length that it used to be' or what I thought it ought to be.

But I often saw James Laidlaw after this, and somehow or other I aye met him just as I was coming out o' the kirk; and weel do I recollect, that one Sabbath in particular he said to me—"Diana, will ye no come out and take a walk after ye get your dinner?" "I dinna ken James," says I, "I doubt I darena, for our fol'. are very particular, and baith my father and my mother are terribly against any thing like gaun about stray vaiging on the Sunday." "O, they need never ken where ye're gaun," says he. "Weel I'll try," says I, for by this time I had a sort o' liking for James. "Then," said he, "I'll be at the Penney Stane at four o'clock." "Very weel," quoth I.

And although baith my father and my mother said to me as I was gaun out—"Where are ye gaun lassie?"—"O no very far," said I, and at four o'clock I met James at the Penny Stane. I shall never forget the grip that he gied my hand when he took it in his, and said—

"Ye have been as good as your word Diana."

We wandered away down by Wedderburn dyke till we came to the Blackadder, and then we sauntered down by the river side till we were opposite Kelloe,—and O! it was a pleasant afternoon. Every thing round about us, aboon us, and amang our feet seemed to ken it was Sunday—every thing but James and me. The lave o'ock was singing in the blue lift,—the blackbirds were whistling in the hedges,—the mavis chaunted its loud sang frae the bushes on the braes,—and the lenmerts* were singing and chirping among the whins,—and the shelfu'† absolutely seemed to follow ye wi' its three notes owre again, in order that ye might learn them.

It was the happiest afternoon I ever spent. James grat, and I grat. I got a scolding frae my father and my mother, when I gaed hame and they demanded ta ken where I had been; but the words that James had spoken to me, bore me up against their reproaches.

Weel it was very shortly, (I dare say not six months after my father's death,) that James called at my mother's, and as he said, to bid us *farewell*! He took my mother's hand,—I mind I saw him raise it to his lips while the tears were on his cheeks; and he was also greatly put about to part wi' my sisters; but to me he said—

"We'll see me down a bit Diana."

He was to take the coach for Liverpool,—or at least a coach to take him on the road to that town, the next day, and from there he was to proceed to the West Indies, to mexican uncle who was to make him his heir.

I went out wi' him, and we wandered away down by our ould walks, but O! he said little and he sighed often, and his heart was sad. But mine was as sad as his, and I could say as little as him. I winna, I canna write a' the words and the vows that passed. He took the chain frae his watch, and it was o' the best gold, and he also took a pair o' bibles from his pocket, and he put the watch chain and the bibles into my hand, and—"Diana," said he, "take these dear—keep them for the sake o' your poor James, and as often as ye see them, think on him." I took them, and wi' the tears running down my cheeks—"O James," cried I, "this is hard!—hard!"

Twice, aye thrice, we bade each other "*farewell*," and thrice after he had parted frae me, he came running back again, and throwing his arms round my neck, cried—

"Diana! I canna leave ye!—promise me that ye will never marry any body else!"

And thrice I promised him that I wouldna.

But he gaed awa', and my only consolation was looking at the bibles, on one o' the white leaves o' the first volume o' which I found written by his own hand, "*James Laidlaw and Diana Darling vowed that if they were spared, they would become man and wife; and that neither time, distance, nor circumstances should absolve their plighted troth. Dated May 25th, 17—*"

These were cheering words to me, and I lived on them for years even after my younger sisters were married, and I had ceased to hear from him. And during that time for his sake I had declined offers, which my friends said I was waur than foolish to reject. At least half a dozen good matches I let slip through my hands, and a' for the love of James Laidlaw who was far awa', and the vows he had plighted to me by the side o' the Blackadder. And although he hadna written to me for some years, I couldna think that any man could be so wicked, as to write words o' falsehood, and bind them up in the volume o' everlasting truth.

But about ten years after he had gaed awa' James Laidlaw came back to our neighbourhood; but he wasna the same lad he left—for he was now a dark-complexioned man, and he had wi' him a mulatto woman and three bairns that called him *faither*! He was no longer my James!

My mother was by this time dead, and I expected naething but that the knowledge o' his faithlessness would kill me too—for I had clung to hope till the last straw was broken.

I met him once during his stay in the country, and strange to tell, it was within a hundred yards o' the very spot where I first forgathered wi' him, when he offered me the posie.

"Ha! Die!" said he, "my old girl, are you still alive? I'm glad to see you. Is the old woman your mother living yet?" I was ready to faint, my heart throbbed as though it would have burst. All the trials I had ever had were naething to this; and he continued—"Why if I remember right, there was once something like an old flame between you and me." "O James! James!" said I, "do ye remember the words ye wrote in the bible, and the vows that ye made me by the side o' the Blackadder?" "Ha! ha!" said he, and he laughed, "you are there are you! I do mind something of it. But Die, I did not think that a girl like you would have been such a fool as to remember what a boy said to her."

I would have spoken to him again, but I remembered that he was the husbane o' another woman,—though she was a mulatto,—an' I hurried away as fast as my fainting heart would permit. I had but one consolation, and that was, that though he had married another, nachody could compare her face wi' mine.

But it was long before I got the better o' this sair night—aye I may say it was ten years and mair; and I had to try to pingle and find a living upon the interest o' my five hundred pounds, wi' any other thing that I could turn my hand to in a genteel sort o' way.

I was now getting on the wrang side o' thirty eight, and that is an age when it isna prudent in a spinster to be throwing the pouty side o' her lip to any decent lad that hauds out his hand, and says—"Jenny will ye tak' me?" Often, and often, baith by day and by night, did I think o' the good bargains I had lost, for the sake o' my fause James Laidlaw, and often when I saw some o' them that had come praying to me, pass me on a Sunday, wi' their wives wi' their arms half round their waist on the horse behint them—"O James! —fause James!" I have said, "but for trusting to you, and it would hae been me that would this day been riding behint Mr. ——

But I had still my five hundred pounds, and sae fend as I could make, to help what they brought to me. And about this time, there was one that had the character of being a very respectable sort o' lad, one Walter Sanderson; he was a farmer, very near about my own age, and altogether a most possessing and intelligent young man. I first met wi' him at my youngest sister's, and I must say a better, or a more graceful dancer I never saw upon a floor. He had neither the jumping o' the mountebank, nor the sliding o' the play actor, but there was an ease in his carriage which I never saw equalled. I was particularly struck wi' him, and especially his dancing!—and it so happened that he was no less struck wi' me. I thought he looked even better than James Laidlaw used to do,—but at times I had my doubts about it. However, he had stopped all the night at my brother-in-law's as weel as myself, and when I got up to gang hame the next day, he said he would bear me company. I thanked him, and said I was obliged to him' never thinking that he would attempt such a thing. But just as the powney was brought out for me to ride on, Mr. Walter Sanderson mounted his horse, and says he—

"Now wi' your permission Miss Darling, I will see ye hame."

It would hae been very rude in me to have said—"No I thank you sir," and especially at my time o' life, wi' two younger sister's married that had families; so I blushed as it were, and gein' my powney a twitch, he sprang on to his saddle, and came trotting by my side. He was a very agreeable company; and when he said "I shall be most happy to pay you a visit Miss Darling," I didna think o' what I had said, until after that I had answered him. "I shall be very happy to see ye sir," and when I thought o' it, my very cheek bones burned wi' shame.

But howsoever Mr. Sanderson was not long in calling again—and often he did call, and my sisters and their good men began to jeer me about him. Weel he called and caltee' for I daresay as good as three quartets of a year; and he was sae backward and modest a' the time that I thought him a very remarkable man; indeed I began to think him every way superior to James Laidlaw.

But at last he made proposals—I consented—the wedding day was set, and we had been cried in the kirk. It was the fair day just two days before we were to be married

* Bael-looking, or, most beautiful.

* Linnets, † Chaffinch,