

EFFIE OGILVIE:
THE STORY OF A YOUNG LIFE.

VOL. I.

BY
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CHAPTER I.

THE family consisted of Effie's father, her stepmother, her brother Eric who was in the army, and a little personage, the most important of all, the only child of the second Mrs. Ogilvie, the pet and plaything of the house. You may think it would have been more respectful and becoming to reverse this description, and present Mr. and Mrs. Ogilvie first to the notice of the reader, which we shall now proceed to do. The only excuse we can offer for the irregularity of the beginning consists in the fact that it is the nature of their proceedings in respect to the young people, and particularly to Mr. Ogilvie's daughter Effie, which induces us to disturb the decorous veil which hangs over the doors of every respectable family, in the case of these worthy persons.

In their own lives, had we time and space to recount all that befell them, there would, no doubt, be many interesting particulars, as in the lives of most other people: but when a country gentleman has attained the age of fifty or a little more, with enough of money for his necessities, and no more ambition than can be satisfied by the regulation of the affairs of the parish, it is inevitably through the fortunes of a son or daughter that he comes within reach of the sympathies of the world. These troublesome productions, of whom we take so little thought at first, who are nothing but playthings and embellishments of our own estate for so many years, have a way of pushing us out of our commanding position as the chief actors in our own lives, setting us aside into a secondary place, and conferring upon us a quite fictitious interest as influences upon theirs. It is an impertinence of fate, it is an irony of circumstance; but still it is so. And it is, consequently, as Effie's father, a

character in which he by no means knew himself, that Mr. Ogilvie of Gilston, a gentleman as much respected as any in his county, the chief heritor in his parish, and a deputy-lieutenant, has now to be presented to the world.

He was a good man in his way, not perfect, as in the general he was himself very willing to allow, though he did not, any more than the rest of us, like that niggling sort of criticism which descends to particulars. He was a man who would have suffered a little personal inconvenience rather than do anything which he was convinced was wrong, which most of us, who are old enough to be acquainted with our own ways, will be aware is no small thing to say. But, ordinarily, also like most of us, his wrong acts were done without taking time to identify them as wrong, on the spur of the moment, in the heat of a present impulse which took from them all the sting of premeditation.

Thus, when he gave good Glen, the virtuous collie, as he came forward smiling and cheerful, with a remark upon the beauty of the morning glistening in his bright eyes and waving majestically in his tail, that sudden kick which sent the good fellow off howling, and oppressed his soul all day with a sense of crime, Mr. Ogilvie did not do it by intention, did not come out with the purpose of doing it, but only did it because he had just got a letter which annoyed him. Glen, who had a tender conscience, lived half the day under a weight of unnecessary remorse, convinced that he must himself have done something very wicked, though a confused moral sense and the absence of a recognized code made him sadly incapable of discovering what it was; but his master had not the slightest intention of inflicting any such mental torture.

He treated his human surroundings in something of the same way, convincing Effie sometimes, by a few well-chosen words, of her own complete mental and physical incompetency; as, for example, when she ran into his library to call his attention to something quite unimportant at the very moment when he was adding up his “sundries,” and had nearly arrived at a result.

“If you had any sense of propriety in you, and were not a born idiot that never can be taught there’s a time for everything, you would know better than to dart in like a whirlwind in your high heels, and all that nonsense in your mouth, to drive a man frantic!”

Effie would withdraw in tears. But Mr. Ogilvie had not really meant any harm.

He had succeeded to his father’s little estate when he was still in his twenties, and had many aspirations. He had not intended to withdraw from the bar, although he had few clients to speak of. He had indeed fully intended to follow up his profession, and it had not seemed impossible that he might attain to the glorious position of Lord Advocate, or, if not, to that of Sheriff-Substitute, which was perhaps more probable. But by degrees, and especially after his marriage, he had found out that professional work was a great “tie,” and that there were many things to be done at home.

His first wife had been the only daughter of the minister, which concentrated his affections still more and more in his own locality. When she died, leaving him with two children, who had never been troublesome to him before, the neighbourhood was moved with the deepest sympathy for poor Ogilvie. Some people even thought he would not survive it, they had been so united a couple,

and lived so entirely for each other: or, at least, that he would go away, abandoning the scene of his past happiness.

But, on the contrary, he stayed at home, paying the tribute of the profoundest dulness for one year to the lost partner of his life, cheering up a little decorously afterwards, and at the end of the second year marrying again. All this was done, it will be seen, in the most respectable and well-regulated way, as indeed was everything that Mr. Ogilvie did when he took time to think of it, being actuated by a conscientious desire to do his duty, and set an example to all honest and virtuous men.

Mrs. Ogilvie was not too young to be the second wife of a gentleman of fifty. She was “quite suitable,” everybody said—which, seeing that he might have married a chit of twenty, as mature widowers have been known to do, was considered by everybody a virtuous abstinence and concession to the duties of the position. She was thirty-five, good-looking, even handsome, and very conscientious. If it was her husband’s virtuous principle to submit to personal inconvenience rather than do anything that he knew to be wrong, she went many steps farther in the way of excellence, and seldom did anything unless she was convinced that it was right.

With this high meaning she had come to Gilston, and during the four years of her reign there had, not sternly—for she was not stern: but steadily, and she was a woman of great steadiness of mind and purpose—adhered to it.

These years had been very important years, as may be supposed, in the life of the two young people whom Mrs. Ogilvie described as “the first family.” The boy had been seventeen and the

girl fifteen when she came home a bride. And their mother had been dead only two years: an age at which criticism is more uncompromising, or circumstances under which it would be more difficult to begin married life, could scarcely be. They gazed at her with two pairs of large eyes, and countenances which did not seem able to smile, noting everything she did, putting a mute criticism upon the silent record, objecting dumbly to everything, to her entrance there at all, to her assumption of their mother's chair, their mother's name, all that was now legally and honourably hers.

Can any one imagine a more terrible ordeal for a woman to go through? She confided to her sister afterwards that if she had acted upon impulse, as Robert, poor dear, so often did, the house would have become a hell on earth.

“I would have liked to have put that boy to the door a hundred times a day: and as for Effie!—I never can tell till this day how it was that I kept my hands off her,” she said, reddening with the recollection of many exasperations past. Women who have filled the office of stepmother, aunt, or any other such domestic anomaly, will understand and sympathize. And yet, of course, there was a great deal to be said on the other side too.

The children had heard with an indignation beyond words of their father's intention. It had been said to them, with that natural hypocrisy which is so transparent and almost pardonable, that he took this step very much for their sakes, to give them a new mother.

A new mother! Seven and five might have taken this in with wondering ears and made no remark; but seventeen and fifteen! The boy glowed with fierce wrath; the girl shed torrents of hot tears. They formed plans of leaving Gilston at once, going away to

seek their fortunes—to America, to Australia, who could tell where? Effie was certain that she would mind no hardship, that she could cook and wash, and do everything in the hut, while Eric (boys are always so much luckier than girls!) spent the day in the saddle after the cattle in the ranche.

Or they would go orange-farming, ostrich-farming—what did it matter which?—anything, in fact, but stay at home. Money was the great difficulty in this as in almost all other cases, besides the dreadful fact that Effie was a girl, a thing which had always been hard upon her in all their previous adventures, but now more than ever.

“We might have gone to sea and worked our passages before the mast, if you had only been a laddie and not a lassie,” Eric said with a sigh and a profound sense of the general contrariety of events. This unalterable misfortune, which somehow seemed (though it was she who suffered from it most) her fault, stopped Effie’s tears, and brought instead a look of despair into her round face. There flashed through her mind an idea of the possibility of neutralizing this disability by means of costume. Rosalind did so in Shakespeare, and Viola, and so had other heroines in less distant regions.

But at the idea of *trousers* Effie’s countenance flamed, and she rejected the thought. It was quite possible to endure being unhappy, even in her small experience she was well aware of that—but unwomanly! Oh, what would mamma say? That utterance of habit, the words that rose to her lips without thinking, even now when mamma was about to have a successor—a new mother! brought back the tears in torrents. She flung herself upon Eric’s shoulder, and he, poor fellow, gave her with quivering lips a little furtive kiss,

the only consolation he could think of, though they were not at all used to caressing each other. Poor children! and yet Mr. Ogilvie had done nothing cruel, and Mrs. Ogilvie was the best-intentioned woman in the world.

It was lucky that they were found at this critical moment by an individual who is of great importance in this little record of events, as he was in the parish and the neighbourhood generally,—that is Uncle John. He was the minister of Gilston; he was their mother's brother; and he was one of the men selected by Providence for the consolation of their fellow-creatures.

Perhaps he was not always very wise. He was too much under the sway of his heart to be infallible in the way of advice, although that heart was so tender and full of sympathy that it often penetrated secrets which were undiscoverable to common men. But in his powers of comfort-giving he was perfect. The very sight of him soothed the angry and softened the obdurate, and he dried the tears of the young by some inspiration given to him alone.

“What is the matter?” he said in his large soft voice, which was deep bass and very masculine, yet had something in it too of the wood-pigeon's brooding tones. They were seated at the foot of a tree in the little wood that protected Gilston House from the east, on the roots of the big ash which were like gray curves of rock among the green moss and the fallen leaves. He came between them, sitting down too, raising Effie with his arm.

“But I think I can guess. You are just raging at Providence and your father, you two ungrateful bairns.”

“Ungrateful!” cried Effie. She was the most speechless of the two, the most prostrate, the most impassioned, and therefore was most ready to reply.

“Oh, what have we to be grateful for?—our own mamma gone away and we’ll never see her more; and another woman—another—a Mistress Ogilvie——” In her rage and despair she pronounced every syllable, with what bitterness and burning scorn and fury! Uncle John drew her little hands down from her face and held them in his own, which were not small, but very firm, though they were soft.

“Your own mother was a very good woman, Effie,” said Uncle John.

The girl paused and looked at him with those fiery eyes which were not softened, but made more angry, by her tears, not seeing how this bore upon the present crisis of affairs.

“Have you any reason to suppose that being herself, as we know she is, with the Lord whom she loved”—and here Uncle John took off his hat as if he were saluting the dearest and most revered of friends—“that she would like you and the rest to be miserable all your lives because she was away?”

“Miserable!” cried Effie. “We were not miserable; we were quite happy; we wanted nothing. Papa may care for new people, but we were happy and wanted nothing, Eric and me.”

“Then, my little Effie,” said Uncle John, “it is not because of your own mother that you are looking like a little fury—for you see you have learned to let her go, and do without her, and be quite

contented in a new way—but only because your father has done the same after his fashion, and it is not the same way as yours.”

“Oh, Uncle John, I am not contented,” cried Effie, conscience-stricken; “I think of mamma every day.”

“And are quite happy,” he said with a smile, “as you ought to be. God bless her up yonder, behind the veil. She is not jealous nor angry, but happy too. And we will be very good friends with Mistress Ogilvie, you and me. Come and see that everything is ready for her, for she will not have an easy handful with you two watching her night and day.”

CHAPTER II.

THOUGH Mr. Moubray said this, it is not to be supposed that he liked his brother-in-law's second marriage. It was not in flesh and blood to do that.

Gilston House must always be the most important house in that parish to the minister; for it is at once nearest to the manse, and the house in which he is most likely to find people who have at least the outside gloss of education. And he had been used to go there familiarly for nearly twenty years. He had been a favourite with the old people, Mr. Ogilvie's father and mother, and when their son succeeded them he was already engaged to the minister's young sister. There was therefore a daily habit of meeting for nearly a lifetime. The two men had not always agreed. Indeed it was not in human nature that they should not have sometimes disagreed strenuously, one being the chief heritor, restraining every expenditure, and the other the minister, who was always, by right of his position, wanting to have something done.

But after all their quarrels they "just 'greed again," which is the best and indeed the only policy in such circumstances. And though the laird would thunder against that "pig-headed fellow, your brother John," Mrs. Ogilvie had always been able to smile, knowing that on the other hand she would hear nothing worse from the minister than a recommendation to "remind Robert that schoolhouse roofs and manse windows are not eternal."

And then the children had woven another link between the two houses. Eric had been Uncle John's pupil since the boy had been old enough to trot unattended through the little wood and across

the two fields which separated the manse from the House; and Effie had trotted by his side when the days were fine, and when she pleased—a still more important stipulation. They had been the children of the manse almost as much as of the House.

The death of the mother had for a time drawn the tie still closer, Ogilvie in his first desolation throwing himself entirely upon the succour and help of his brother-in-law; and the young ones clinging with redoubled tenderness to the kind Uncle John, whom for the first time they found out to be “so like mamma!” There never was a day in which he did not appear on his way to his visiting, or to a session meeting, or some catechising or christening among the hills. They were dependent upon him, and he upon them. But now this constant association had come to an end. No, not to an end—that it could never do; but, in all likelihood, it must now change its conditions.

John Moubray was an old bachelor without chick or child: so most people thought. In reality, he was not a bachelor at all; but his married life had lasted only a year, and that was nearly thirty years ago! The little world about might be excused for forgetting—or himself even—for what is one year out of fifty-four? Perhaps that one year had given him more insight into the life of men; perhaps it had made him softer, tenderer to the weak. That mild celibacy, which the Church of Rome has found so powerful an instrument, was touched perhaps to a more benignant outcome still in this Scotch minister, by the fact that he had loved like his fellows, and been as other men in his time, a triumphant bridegroom, a woman’s husband. But the experience itself was long past, and had left no trace behind; it was to him as a dream. Often he felt uncertain whether there had been any reality in it at all—whether it was not a golden vision such as is permitted to youth.

In these circumstances, it may be supposed that the closing upon him in any degree of the house which had been his sister's, which belonged to the most intimate friend of everyday life, and which was the home of children who were almost his own children, was very serious to Uncle John.

Mrs. Ogilvie, to do her justice, was anxious to obviate any feeling of this kind. The very first time he dined there after her marriage, she took him aside into a corner of the drawing-room, and talked to him privately.

"I hope there will be no difference, Mr. Moubray," she said; "I hope you will not let it make any difference that I am here."

"Difference?" said John, startled a little. He had already felt the difference, but had made up his mind to it as a thing that must be.

"I know," said the lady, "that I'm not clever enough to take your sister's place; but so far as a good meaning goes, and a real desire to be a mother to the children, and a friend to you, if you will let me, nobody could be better disposed than I am, if you will just take me at my word."

The minister was so unprepared for any such speech that he stammered a little over his reply.

"My sister," he said, "had no pretensions to be clever. That was never the ground my poor Jeanie took up. She was a good woman, and very dear to——very dear to those she belonged to," he said, with a huskiness in his voice.

"That's just what I say. I come here in a way that is hard upon a woman, with one before me that I will always be compared to. But this one thing I must say, that I hope you will come about the

house just as often as you used to do, and in the same way, coming in whenever it enters your head to do so, and believing that you are always welcome. Always welcome. I don't say I will always be here, for I think it only right to keep up with society (if it were but for Effie's sake) more than the last Mrs. Ogilvie did. But I will never be happy if you don't come out and in just in your ordinary, Mr. Moubray, just as you've always been accustomed to do."

John Moubray went home after this address with a mingled sense of humour and vexation and approval. It made him half angry to be invited to his brother-in-law's house in this way, as if he required invitation. But, at the same time, he did not deny that she meant well.

And she did mean well. She meant to make Effie one of the most complete of young ladies, and Gilston the model country-seat of a Scots gentleman. She meant to do her duty to the most minute particular. She meant her husband to be happy, and her children to be clothed in scarlet and prosperity, and comfort to be diffused around.

All these preliminaries were long past at the point at which this narrative begins. Effie had grown up, and Eric was away in India with his regiment. He had not been intended for a soldier, but whether it was that Mrs. Ogilvie's opinion, expressed very frankly, that the army was the right thing for him, influenced the mind of the family in general, or whether the lad found the new rule too unlike the old to take much pleasure in his home, the fact was that he went into the army and disappeared, to the great grief of Effie and Uncle John, but, so far as appeared, of no one else, for little Roderick had just been born, and Mr. Ogilvie was ridiculously

delighted with the baby, which seemed to throw his grown-up son altogether into the shade.

It need scarcely be said that both before and after this event there was great trouble and many struggles with Effie, who had been so used to her own way, Mrs. Ogilvie said, that to train her was a task almost beyond mortal powers. Yet it had been done. So long as Eric remained at home, the difficulties had been great.

And then there was all but the additional drawback of a premature love story to make matters worse. But that had been happily, silently, expeditiously smothered in the bud, a triumph of which Mrs. Ogilvie was so proud that it was with difficulty she kept it from Effie herself; and she did not attempt to keep it from Mr. Moubray, to whom, after the lads were safely gone, she confided the fact that young Ronald Sutherland, who had been constantly about the house before her marriage, and who since that had spent as much of his time with the brother and sister out-of-doors as had been possible, had come to Mr. Ogilvie a few days before his departure—"What for, can you imagine?" the lady said.

Now Ronald was a neighbour's son, the companion by nature of the two children of Gilston. He had got his commission in the same regiment, and joined it at the same time as Eric. He was twenty when Eric was eighteen, so much in advance and no more. The minister could have divined, perhaps, had he set his wits to the task, but he had no desire to forestall the explanation, and he shook his head in reply.

"With a proposal for Effie, if you please!" Mrs. Ogilvie said, "and she only sixteen, not half-educated, nor anything like what I want her to be. And, if you will believe me, Robert was half-

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