

JOYCE

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT

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CHAPTER I

IT was a coming of age, and yet not a coming of age. The hero in honour of whom all these festivities were, was a bearded man, who had been absent in all sorts of dangerous places since the moment when he was supposed formally to have ended the state of pupilage. That had been later than common, since the will of his uncle, whom he had succeeded, had stipulated that he was to come of age at twenty-five. He was nearer thirty when he came home, bearded as has been said, bronzed, with decorations upon his breast, and a character quite unlike that of the young hero to whom such honours are usually paid. His position altogether was a peculiar one. The estates of the family were not entailed, and Mr. Bellendean of Bellendean, the uncle, had passed over his own brother, who was still living, and left everything to his nephew; so that Norman was in the peculiar position of being received by his father and mother in a house which was not theirs but his, and of standing in the place of the head of the family, while the natural head of his own branch of the family was put aside. The character of the people made this as little embarrassing as it was possible for such a false position to be, but still it was not easy; and as the young man was full of delicate feeling and susceptibility, notwithstanding an acquaintance with the world unusual in his circumstances, he had looked forward to it with some apprehension. Perhaps it would be wiser to say that he thought he was acquainted with the world. He had been 'knocking about' for the last ten years, seeing all the service that was to be seen, and making acquaintance with various quarters of the globe. He thought he knew men and life. In reality he knew a little of Scotland, a great deal of India,

and had a trifling acquaintance with some of the colonies; but of London, Paris, all the capitals that count for anything, and all the life that counts for anything, he was as ignorant as a child.

This combination is one which was not at all unusual in Scotland a generation since, and produced a kind of character full of attraction, the most piquant mixture of experience and ignorance, of simplicity and knowledge, that can be conceived. A man who had an eye as keen as lightning for the wiles of an Eastern, were he prince or slave, but could be taken in with the most delightful ease by the first cab-driver in the streets; who could hold his own before a durbar of astute oriental politicians, but was at the mercy of the first flower-girl who offered him a rosebud for his buttonhole, or *gamin* who held his horse. He had the defects as well as the virtues common to a dominant race, and probably was imperious and exacting in the sphere which he knew best; but this tendency was completely neutralised by the confusion which arose in his mind from the fact of finding himself suddenly among a population entirely made up of this dominant race, to whom he could be nothing but polite, whatever their condition might be. He was very polite and friendly to the railway porters, to all the people he encountered on the journey home, and reluctant to give trouble to the pretty fair chambermaids at the hotels, or to pass, without inquiring into their story, the women who begged or sold trifles on the streets. 'A respectable-looking woman, and English by her accent,' he would say. 'We must stop and inquire into it. There must be a reason, you know.' 'Oh yes; probably there's a reason. Come along, or you'll have all the vagrants at your heels,' his more experienced companion would reply. They had thus a little difficulty in getting him safely through the streets at his first arrival. Home was strange to him; it was a place where all the men were

honest and all the women true. He was ready to believe everything that was said to him in the new England which somehow was so unlike the old which he had seen only in passing so long ago.

The party he had brought with him consisted of two or three brother officers, unnecessary to dwell upon here; an older friend, Colonel Hayward, whom he had known very well and served under, and who had now retired from the service, who joined young Bellendean in Edinburgh, being already in the North; and a young man about town called Essex, who had made a tour in India a year before, and was very willing to repay the kindness shown him then by taking care of his military friend and steering him through the dangers of London. Essex, who had a mild handle to his name, and was Sir Harry, would have liked to prolong the period of his tutorship, and lead his young soldier about into pleasures and wonders unknown. But the claims of Bellendean and the great festivities concerted there were supreme. It was thus a party of four or five young men, chaperoned, if the word is applicable, by the *vieux moustache*, the steady old soldier, as ready for a frolic as any of them, who was yet, as he assured them, old enough to be their father, who arrived at the Bellendean station, where flags were flying, and the militia band blaring forth its welcome, and a body of mounted farmers waiting to escort their landlord to his paternal halls. For Bellendean it was a very fine reception indeed; and Norman himself, being of a simple mind, was much impressed. If the others laughed a little, that was partly, no doubt, because they were by no means the heroes of the day, and because, in the eagerness about 'the Ca'aptain,' the desire to identify him, and the disdainful indifference shown to everything that was not he, these gentlemen were thrown into the background, where they grinned and looked on. Colonel Hayward, however,

was as much impressed and still more delighted than Norman. He would have liked to shake hands with all the tenantry as he did with Mr. Bellendean the father, and assure them all that 'there could not be a finer fellow;' and when they raised a cheer as the carriage drove off, joined in it lustily, with a sense of being at once a spectator yet an actor in the scene which it was delightful to see.

Bellendean was a handsome house, of no particular age or pretensions, not very far from Edinburgh. That beautiful town was indeed visible from various points in the park, which, on the other hand, commanded a view of the Firth and the low hills of Fife, at the point where the great estuary closes in, and with a peaceful little island in mid-stream, and a ruin or two on the margin of the water, forms that tranquil basin, in which, driven by storms of wind and storms of nations, the Athelings, pious folk, the Confessor's kindred—not strong enough by themselves to hold head against fierce Normans and Saxons any more than against the wild tides of the Northern Ocean—once found a refuge. The rich and mellow landscape, brightened with vast rolling fields of corn and ripening orchards, startled the visitors from India, whose ideas of Scotland were all Highland; but increased their respect for their lucky comrade, of whom they had been accustomed to think that his estate was some little patrimony among the mountains, where there might indeed be grouse and perhaps deer to make poverty sweet, but nothing more profitable. The Lowland landscape lay under a flood of afternoon light. The roads were populous with passengers,—there were groups of ladies in front of the house, on the terrace to which the long windows opened: a beautiful park and fine trees, and all the evidences of that large life which a country potentate leads in what our fathers called his 'seat.' Everything was wealthy, almost splendid; Bellendean himself felt a certain

awe as he looked upon all this which was his own. He remembered everything keenly, and yet it had not seemed to him so great, so imposing in his recollection as it was in reality. He had remembered his own favourite haunts, which were not the most important features in the scene. He turned to his father with a curious shyness and embarrassment. 'I had forgotten what a fine place it was,' he said; but his eyes said something else, which natural reserve and the presence of strangers kept from his lips. What his eyes said was—'Pardon! that it should not be yours but mine.'

'It is a fine place,' said Mr. Bellendean. 'The places we have known only in youth are apt to look diminished when we come back. I am glad it has not that effect on you. All the same, my dear boy, I am glad it is you and not I that have to live in it. Neither my wife nor I care much for Bellendean.'

At this Norman grasped his father's hand, and said, 'You are very good, sir,' in a way which much perplexed the excellent Colonel, who did not understand wherein the virtue lay, and who was further stricken dumb by the next question. 'In the confusion and excitement of seeing you again, I believe I have not asked for Mrs. Bellendean?'

The reader is too experienced not to perceive that this question, which bewildered Colonel Hayward, conveyed the not very extraordinary fact that Norman had a step-mother, which was one of the chief reasons of his long absence. Not that Mrs. Bellendean was a harsh or cruel step-mother, or one of those spoilers of domestic peace who flourish in literature under that title; but only that the young man remembered his mother, and could ill bear to see another in her place. She stood on the steps of the great door at

this moment, awaiting the carriage—a woman not more than forty, tall and fair, dressed a little more soberly than her age required, but full of youth and animation in look and figure. A number of ladies stood behind her, some of them 'as pretty creatures as ever I saw,' the Colonel said to himself—cousins of all degrees, old playfellows, old friends. The *vieux moustache* stood by while these pleasant spectators surged about young Bellendean. He stood aside and made his remarks. 'I shouldn't wonder now if he might marry any one of them,' he said to himself. 'Lucky fellow. I shouldn't wonder now if they were all waiting till he throws the handkerchief. Talk about sultans! all those pretty English—no, they are Scotch—girls: and he could have any one of them!' The Colonel sighed at the thought. He belonged himself to an age in which statistics had no place, before it was known that there was a million or so of superfluous women, and being a chivalrous soul he did not like it. He was much pleased to discover afterwards that several of the young ladies were married, and so out of the competition. But it was a pretty sight.

After this the days were tolerably well filled. There was a dinner to the neighbouring gentry, and a dinner to the tenantry. There was a ball. There was a great supper in tents to the labourers and cottagers on the estate; finally, there was a vast entertainment for the school children in the united parishes of Bellendean and Prince's Ferry. The Colonel went through them all manfully. He carried out his original impulse, shook hands with everybody, and said, 'I assure you he's a capital fellow.' 'I had him under my command at So-and-so, and So-and-so, and I know what's in him.' In this way Colonel Hayward was himself a great success. The old county neighbours liked the assurance he gave them, and the farmers delighted in it. And when it came to the turn of the masses,

and the old soldier went about among the tables at the labourers' supper repeating his formula, the enthusiasm was immense. 'Eh, Cornel, but that's a real satisfaction,' the old men said. 'Sae lang as he's done his duty, what can mortal man do mair?' His own assurances and reassurances went to the good Colonel's head. He felt like a trumpeter whose note was the word of command to everybody, and marched about with his head high. 'I assure you he's a capital fellow, a capital fell——' He was in the very act of repeating them, when the words seemed to fail him all at once. He stopped in the middle with his mouth open, and gazed at some one who at that moment for the first time caught his eye.

Was it because her place did not seem to be there? A girl of twenty or so—tall, slight, her figure like a lily-stalk slightly swaying forward, her head raised, with a tremor of sympathy in every feature. Her face was like a lily too, pale, with large eyes, either brown or blue, he could not be sure which, and long eyelashes uplifted; and the most sensitive mouth, which smiled yet quivered, and made as though repeating the words, which the eyes seemed to divine before they were said. She was seated at the end of a table with two old people, too old to be her father and mother, looking as if she had strayed there by some strange chance, as if she had nothing to do with the vulgar features of the feast, like a young princess who had sat down among them to please them. The words were stopped upon the Colonel's lips. He broke down in the middle, and stood staring at her, not knowing where he was. Good Lord! that face: and sitting there among the common people, among the labourers, the ploughmen! It did not seem to Colonel Hayward that anybody about was surprised at his stare. They, too, turned round and looked at her kindly, or—not kindly, as the case might be. But they were not surprised. They understood his wonder.

‘Ay, sir, she’s a very bonnie lass,’ said one old man. ‘A bonnie lass! a bonnie lass!’ the Colonel repeated; but not with the tone in which he had spoken about the capital fellow. It was as if some blow had been struck at him which took away his utterance. He hurried up to Mrs. Bellendean, who stood at the head of the tent looking on. ‘A young lady, my dear Colonel? there are no young ladies there.’ ‘You must know her if I could but point her out to you. She is like no one else about her. It is not curiosity. I have a particular reason for asking.’ ‘Tell me what she was like,’ the gracious lady said; but just then her husband came to consult her about something, and the opportunity was lost.

Colonel Hayward retired from his trumpeting for that night. He let Norman’s reputation take its chance. He was very silent all the rest of the evening, not even repeating his question when he had an opportunity, but sitting by himself and thinking it over. It was a remarkable face: but no doubt the resemblance must be a chance resemblance. There are so many faces in the world, and some of them here and there must resemble each other. It must be something in his own mind, some recollection that had come to him unawares, an association from the Scotch voices he heard round him. That, when he came to think of it, must have been working in his mind all day; indeed, ever since he came. And this was the issue. Every mental process (people say) can be explained if you trace it out. And this one was not so difficult after all, not difficult at all, when you came to think of it, he said to himself, nodding his head; but all the same, he could not help wishing that Elizabeth had been here. And then he began to think again of that girl. She was not like a girl to be found sitting with the ploughmen’s families. He seemed to see her before him, especially when he shut his eyes and gave himself up to it, which he did in a

retired corner on the terrace after everybody had gone away. Though it was late, there was still light in the skies, partly the lingering northern daylight, partly the moon, and he shut his eyes while he smoked his cigar and pondered. He could see her before him, that girl, in a dark dress made (he thought—but then he did not know much about it) like a lady's—certainly with a face like a lady's, or how could she have resembled——? Of course, it was only association, and the recollections that came back to him with those Lowland voices. The Highland ones had never affected him in the same way. The fact was, he said to himself, he was never half a man when Elizabeth was not with him. She would have understood the sequence of ideas at once. She would have found out in five minutes who the girl was and all about her, and set him at rest. He was interrupted in those thoughts by the sudden irruption of the band of young men with their cigars into the balmy quiet of the night. It was warm, and they had found the smoking-room hot. 'And there is old Hayward gone to sleep in a corner,' he heard one of them say.

'He must not sleep,' said Mr. Bellendean; 'wake him up, Norman. The air here is too keen for that.'

'I am no more asleep than any one of you young fellows,' the Colonel said, jumping up. 'But as old Hayward has more sense than a set of boys, he kept outside here in the cool while you were all heating yourselves in the smoking-room. I don't think they've got the best of it this time, Mr. Bellendean, eh?'

'They don't half so often as they think,' said the other old gentleman. They were neither of them very old, but they drew together with a natural sympathy amid that band of youth.

Next day was the concluding day of the Bellendean festivities, and it was chiefly to be devoted to the children. In the afternoon the park was turned into an immense playground. Every kind of game and entertainment that could be thought of was provided. There was a conjurer, there was Punch, there was a man with marionettes, and what the children liked still better, there were games of all kinds, in which they could themselves perform, which is always more agreeable than seeing other people do so. And finally, there was tea—a wonderful tea, in which mountains of cake and cookies innumerable disappeared like magic. The ladies were all there, serving actively the flushed and happy crowds of children, throwing themselves into it with much more sympathy than they had shown with the substantial feasts of the previous days. The young men were set free, they were not required to help in the entertainment of the boys and girls; and except Norman, who had bravely determined to do his duty to the end, the male portion of the company was represented only by Mr. Bellendean and the Colonel, who looked on from the terrace, and finally took a walk round the tent where the meal was going on, and partook, as the newspapers say, of a cup of tea at a little separate table in a corner, where Mrs. Bellendean was taking that refreshment. It was when the Colonel (who liked his tea) was standing with a cup in his hand, just outside the great tent, which was steaming with the entertainment, that he suddenly stopped once more in the midst of a little speech he was making about the pleasure of seeing children enjoy themselves. He stopped with a little start, and then he set down his cup and turned back to watch something. It was afternoon, but the sun was still high in the skies, and even under the tent there was full daylight, impaired by no shadows or uncertainty. The shade within gave a suppressed and yellow glow to everything, something like the air of a theatre: and in the midst

there she stood once more, the girl of last night! The Colonel gazed at her with an absorption, an abstraction, which was extraordinary. He saw nothing but only her alone. She had been seated by the old ploughman on the previous night as if she belonged to him; but now she was moving about among the children as the young ladies were doing, serving and encouraging: her dress was very simple, but so was theirs, and there was not one of them more graceful, more at her ease. Everybody knew her. She seemed to be referred to on all hands; by the children, who came clinging about her—by the visitors, who seemed to consult her upon everything. Who could she be? The clergyman's daughter perhaps; but then, how had she come to be seated last night between the old couple, who were clearly labouring people, at the cottagers' supper? And how had she come by that face? Whoever she might be, gentlewoman or rustic maiden, how had she come by that face? There was the wonder.

The Colonel stood fascinated, immovable, at the tent-door, looking in, seeing all the moving crowd of faces only as a background to this one, which seemed, in his fancy, to reign over them all. Her face was not still and attentive, as on the previous night, but full of animation and life. He watched the children come round her as they finished their meal, which was pretty to see; he watched the ladies coming and going, always circling more or less about this one figure. He watched Norman going up to her, holding out his hand, which she took, showing for the first time a little rustic shyness, curtsying as if he had been a prince. Then he saw a quite different sort of man from Norman, one of the schoolmasters, go to her in his turn and say something in her ear, with an evident claim upon her attention and a lingering touch on her arm, which spoke much, which made the Colonel angry, as if the fellow had

presumed. But the girl evidently did not think he presumed. A smile lighted up her face, which she turned to him looking up in his. Colonel Hayward felt a movement of impatience take possession of him: and then a still stronger feeling swept across his mind. As she turned her face with that look of tender attention to the man who addressed her, she turned it also to the spectator looking at her from the tent-door. The line of the uplifted head, the soft chin, the white throat, the eyes raised with their long eyelashes—‘Good God! who is she?’ he said aloud.

Mrs. Bellendean saw the absorbed expression in his face, and came and stood beside him to see what he was looking at. Her own face relaxed into smiles when she found out the object of his gaze. ‘Oh, I don’t wonder now at your interest, Colonel. I am sure she has had no tea; she would never think of looking after herself. Now, come, you shall see her nearer; she is worth looking at: Joyce!’ she cried.

‘Joyce! Good God!’

CHAPTER II

COLONEL HAYWARD sank down upon a bench which stood close to the tent door. The light swam in his eyes. He saw only as through a mist the light figure advancing, standing docile and obedient by the side of the great lady. The name completed the extraordinary impression which the looks had made; he kept saying it over to himself under his breath in his bewilderment. 'Joyce! Good Lord!' But presently the urgency of the circumstances brought him to himself. He breathed in his soul a secret desire for Elizabeth: then manned himself to act on his own behalf, since no better could be.

'This is the very best girl in the world, Colonel Hayward,' said Mrs. Bellendean, with a hand upon Joyce's shoulder. 'I don't wonder she interested you. She has taught herself every sort of thing—Latin and mathematics, and I don't know all what. Our school is always at the head in all the examinations, and she really raises quite an enthusiasm among the children. I don't know what we should do without her. Whenever we come here, Joyce is my right hand, and has been since she was quite a child.'

If it was condescension, it was of the most gracious kind. Mrs. Bellendean kept patting Joyce on the shoulder as she spoke, with a caressing touch: and her eyes and her voice were both soft. The girl responded with a look full of tenderness and pleasure. 'Oh, mem, it is you who are always so good to me,' she said.

The schoolmistress then! That was how the ploughman's daughter had got her superior look. When he saw her closer, he thought he saw (enlightened by this knowledge) that it was only a

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