

**THE HOUSE ON THE
MOOR
VOL. II.**

**BY
Mrs. Oliphant**

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THE HOUSE ON THE MOOR.

CHAPTER I.

SAM returned victorious, with an Army List, and the Rector's compliments, who would call upon Colonel Sutherland presently, in time to wake up the excellent Colonel, who was a little amazed, and a little amused at himself, to be made aware of that unusual indulgence. Sam had his own word of advice and warning against the deceitful blandishments of the "Ould Hunderd," with which he went away, flattered and ashamed, but by no means cured of his passion for "sodgering." To the questions of his mother, the hopeful young man only responded, that "the Cornel said th' army was a noble pefession," and appended thereto a vow to "break the head of that thundering 'Ould Hunderd'" at the first opportunity, neither of which conclusions was satisfactory to Mrs. Gilsland. The Colonel had scarcely put on his spectacles, and begun to turn over the leaves of the professional beadroll, when the proprietor of the same made his appearance, very cordial and anxious that the Colonel should dine at the Rectory, where the mother and sisters of "my boy in India" were already preparing themselves with a hundred questions to ask the old Indian officer. Colonel Sutherland, however, had already tasted quite enough of the damp, out-of-doors air for one day. He made the most of his threatening rheumatism by way of apology. He was fatigued with a long drive, and taking leave of friends. The Rector was politely curious; he had no doubt that he had the pleasure of knowing Colonel Sutherland's friends?

"I think not," said the Colonel, decidedly; "my brother-in-law is a recluse, and, I fear, keeps his family in the same retirement; besides, it is five miles off."

“Five miles is nothing in the country,” said the courteous and persistent Rector.

“My relations live at Marchmain,” said Colonel Sutherland, who had still the “Army List” in his hand—“I want to find out if the Sir John Armitage of this neighbourhood is an old friend of mine—Captain Armitage of the 59th—do you happen to know?”

“The very same,” said the Rector; “he succeeded six or seven years ago, but he has not been at the Park for a year back. Bad health, I believe, an unsettled mind—he has never taken kindly to his new position; he thinks it is his duty to marry, and is extremely nervous about it. I thought it proper to pay him a good deal of attention when he was here. Poor man, his anxiety about the young ladies of the neighbourhood, and his terror of them, is something ludicrous to see.”

“You are so fortunate as to have daughters of your own,” said the Colonel, without perceiving the inference, which the other, possibly from a little disagreeable consciousness, applied instantly.

“My daughters were very young at that time,” said the Rector, quickly—“almost children; besides, there are many points in which, though I think it right to show him attention, I do not approve of Sir John. His opinions are not what could be desired, and the father of daughters requires to be very careful whom he commits them to, as perhaps you are aware, Colonel Sutherland.”

Colonel Sutherland bowed very gravely; the appeal touched on griefs too profound to be exposed to the compassion of a stranger. “He was a very good fellow when I knew him,” said the Colonel; “I hear he was on terms of very intimate friendship with a Mr. Musgrave—he who died lately—is that true?”

“Ah, Mr. Musgrave?—yes, I knew him very well; an unfortunate, imprudent man, lavish and foolish,” said the Rector. “He had a very good fortune to begin with, but lived with the most entire recklessness, like a man of three times his means. He brought up a young man, a sort of distant relative, as his heir. Poor man, when the affairs were examined it turned out that the heir had nothing but debt to enter upon; a very sad business altogether. Ah, yes, to be sure, Sir John, now that I recollect, had been to school with him, or something—there *was* a friendship between them.”

“And does no one in the neighbourhood feel disposed to do anything for the young man?” asked the Colonel.

“For—Roger? Well, it is a very difficult question,” said the bland Rector; “men with families of their own are so circumscribed in that way. There are no very wealthy men in our neighbourhood; and really, no one has felt warranted in incurring so great a responsibility. Sir John, indeed, might have done something for him; but then he is abroad, and of course no private individual likes to step forward, and perhaps excite expectations which could never be realized; besides, he has, no doubt, relatives of his own.”

“And so, I presume, there is an end of him, poor fellow,” said the Colonel, with the least outbreak of impatience; “is there anything known against the young man?”

“Nothing in the world,” said the Rector, readily; “we all received him with pleasure, and found him really an acquisition; a young man not of much education, to be sure, but perfectly unobjectionable in a moral point of view. I remember urging strongly upon the late Squire the propriety of sending Roger to Cambridge, when my own boy went there, for we had no suspicion

then of his unfortunate circumstances. He would not, sir; he was an unreasonable, old-fashioned person—what you call a John Bull sort of man. He said his Nimrod had no occasion to be a student. Poor man!—he would have acknowledged the wisdom of my counsels had he been living now.”

“Is the young man, then, a Nimrod?” asked Colonel Sutherland.

“I understand—for of course such exploits are a little out of my way,” said the gracious Rector—“that he is one of the best shots in the country; and I know from my boy, who was fond of athletic sports, that he excels in most of them. So much the worse for him now. It is a very sad thing, and one unfortunately too common, to see young men brought up to no other habits than those of a country gentleman, and then launched upon life with the sentiment of the unjust steward, ‘To dig I know not, and to beg I am ashamed.’”

There was a little pause after this solemn and somewhat professional utterance, the Colonel not perceiving exactly how to answer this calm regret and sympathy, which never conceived the idea of helping, by a little finger, the misfortune it deplored. After a little silence, the Rector added, “You were acquainted with Mr. Musgrave, perhaps?—you feel an interest in the young man?”

“I do, certainly—though I had no acquaintance whatever with his former circumstances; he has been thrown accidentally in my way since I came here,” said Colonel Sutherland.

“Let us never say anything is done accidentally,” said the Rector, rising to take his leave with the most ingratiating smile—for he was low church, and evangelical in theology, however he might be in his actions; “everything has a purpose, my dear sir. Let

us hope that it is *providentially* for poor Roger that he has been thrown in your way.”

So saying, with many regrets that he should not have the pleasure of entertaining the stranger at the Rectory, the excellent incumbent of Tillington left him. The Colonel shrugged his shoulders when he was gone. The authoritative, insinuating professional manner with which his reverence corrected the expression of the old Christian stranger, who, coming “accidentally” to a knowledge of Roger’s trouble, was after all the only neighbour whom the poor youth found in his extremity, made the Colonel both smile and sigh. “Right enough to correct me,” said to himself the Scotch soldier, whose ideas of Providence wanted no enlargement by such advice; but once more the Colonel shrugged his shoulders, and remembered involuntarily the priest and the Levite who passed on the other side. He could not comprehend this entire want of all neighbourly and kindly feeling among the inhabitants of the same locality. The old man had been so long absent from home, and was so much accustomed to attribute the want of human kindness, which of course he had seen many times in his life, to the deteriorating effect of a strange country, and the entire want of home influences, that it amazed him now to perceive how even the primitive bosom of an English rural village held sentiments of self-regard as cold and unneighbourly as anything he had met with in the faraway world to which he was accustomed. Why could not this Rector, the friend and consoler of his parish by right of his office, a man who (undeniable inducement to all tenderness in the Colonel’s tender heart) had children of his own—why did not *he* take the matter in hand, and appeal to Sir John Armitage, if the baronet alone was to be expected to do anything on Roger’s behalf? The Colonel shook

his head over it, and took refuge in his dinner. No repetition of instances would make the generous old man adopt or believe in this as the way of the world; he had only stumbled unfortunately upon cold-hearted individuals. Heaven forbid that *he* should put such a stigma on his brethren and his kind!

CHAPTER II.

HE had scarcely finished his dinner, when young Musgrave came to him, full of excitement and emotion, with a letter in his hand. The Colonel received him with all the more cordiality, that he had not yet quite lost the impression of the Rector's visit. The young man had evidently something to tell, and that something as evidently was of a nature to move him much.

“You are the only individual who has shown any interest in me,” cried poor Roger; “I could not rest till I had come to tell you: I am not so entirely alone as I supposed I was. Look here, sir, a letter from my mother—my dear mother, whom I have never been able to forget, whom I have never ceased to love. I have done her injustice, Colonel; though she has only written it for my eyes, I bring it to you, because to you I have accused her unjustly. My mother has neither forgotten nor forsaken me!”

And with honest tears in his eyes, the young man thrust his letter into the Colonel's hands, half reluctant, it is true, to show his mother's expressions of love, but eager, above all, that she should be done full justice to, and acquitted of all unkindness. The Colonel took the letter with grave sympathy. It was not by way of conquering Roger's heart entirely that he put on his spectacles with so much serious attention, and applied himself to the hurried and half-coherent letter as if it were something of the gravest importance. He did naturally, and spontaneously from his own heart, this, which was the most exquisite compliment to the young man; and the Colonel's glasses grew dim as he read. It was the letter of a weak, loving woman, with too little strength of character

to assert for herself any right of protecting or succouring her first-born, who was alien and strange to her husband and his family. One could almost see the gentle, broken-spirited woman over-ridden even by her own children, uncertain of her own mind, in weak health, and with nerves which everything affected, as one glanced over those hurried lines, which seemed to be written in absolute fear of discovery. There was little in them but the mother's yearning for her boy—her dear boy, her first-born, her own Roger, whom she prayed for on her knees every day, and thought of every hour. There was neither wisdom nor reason in the epistle—the poor woman had nothing to advise, nothing to offer. A cold observer might have thrown the whole away as affectionate nonsense, and desired to know what benefit that could be to the young man in his troubles. The Colonel knew better. “Therewithal the water stood in his eyes.” He knew, without a word from Roger, how this tender touch had stanchd the wounds of the young man's heart.

The only thing which he did not understand was a blurred and hasty postscript, to the effect that the enclosed was *her own*, and that her dear boy need have no hesitation in using it. This Musgrave explained to him by holding up, as he received back the letter, a twenty-pound note.

“And my mother enclosed this, sir,” he said, looking up with an honest eagerness which twenty twenty-pound notes could not have produced—the poor lad was so proud to be able to show this evidence of his mother's concern for him. “I know she must have saved it up—spared it from her own necessities for me; I know she must, for she knows very well I would never receive an alms from *him*,” cried poor Roger. “I—I daresay you think it's not very much to talk about, Colonel, but I could not rest till you had seen that I

was wrong. To think I should have done her such injustice!—and you perceive, sir, that I can indeed take a week or two’s leisure before I decide upon my future *now*.”

“I am very glad of it,” said the Colonel; “and still more glad that you have your mother’s letter to comfort you. Take a lesson by it my boy, and never think you’re forsaken. If we could know exactly our neighbour’s circumstances, and see into their hearts, we would be slow to judge them, let alone dear friends. ‘Can a mother forget her child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?’ Ah! my young friend, God knows better than we do the nature he has made. Here are two things come at once—your heart is comforted, and you are content to wait?”

Roger hung his head for a moment at the last proposition; he felt a little ashamed of giving in to the dawn of expectation which his last interview with Colonel Sutherland had excited in him in spite of himself; but the Colonel’s unlooked-for kindness, and the affection of his mother, had warmed the young man’s heart, and put him once more on good terms with the world. He began to believe in friendship and kindness, and to think that, after all, matters were not hopeless with him; but still his high spirit revolted from the idea of waiting till an application for aid had been made on his behalf, and doing nothing on his own account till that had been granted or refused.

“I can wait, and think it all over again for a few days,” he said, with a little hesitation, “though indeed there is little to think of; for the case is not at all changed; but because you wish it, Colonel—you who have been so kind to me. I would be a poor fellow indeed, if I could not wait for a time for your pleasure.”

“Very well,” said Colonel Sutherland, with a smile; “we will let it stand on these grounds—it will please me. I have made a discovery also to-day. I find that your Sir John Armitage is an old friend of mine. I shall be very glad to seek him up for my own sake; they tell me he is invalid, and unsettled; but that should not make him less cordial to his fellow-creatures. We have been under fire together, and under canvas. He is an older acquaintance of mine than of yours. It will be odd if two old soldiers, when they lay their heads together, can do nothing to help on a young one. I have a little influence myself, and my own boy is secure. Some day you two may stand by each other when we old fellows are gone. I daresay, if you were together, you would not be long of making friends with my Ned. He is an honest fellow, though his father says it, and I think never gave me an hour’s pain.”

“But what can I say? I who have no claim whatever on your kindness, why are you so good to me?” cried Roger, astonished; “thanking you is folly; I have no words for it; it is beyond thanks; why are you so generous to me?”

“Tut, boy, nonsense!—I have sons of my own,” said Colonel Sutherland; “and what is the good of an old man in this world? By-the-bye, tell me—have you ever sought or admitted the friendship of your neighbours since your grief? There are various families hereabout, I understand; your Rector for example—I am afraid you must have repulsed that good man in your first trouble—eh?—remember I am hard of hearing; you were too melancholy, too miserable for sympathy, and you have taken it into your head since that they had ceased to care for you?”

“I was thankful for all the sympathy I got; I trusted everybody then,” said Roger, simply; “but—it does not matter,” he said, after

a little hesitation; “I found out the difference afterwards; no—it was not me.”

“But the Rector—he has children, a son—was not he very friendly?” asked the Colonel, with persistence; he wanted to ascertain, as closely as he could, what was the real state of the case.

“Ah, Willy!”—said Roger; he paused a little, and grew red, and shook his head with a slight, involuntary motion, as if to shake off some disagreeable thoughts. “We were very good friends once,” he said—“pah! why should I care—you will not think worse of me, Colonel Sutherland? I had rather not think of Willy. It is the greatest folly in the world, but I cannot help it; when I think of meeting him, perhaps, in my changed circumstances—I who used to be almost, if there was any difference, superior to him—I feel it painful; I don’t like the idea; this is the plain truth. I had rather not go to India for the risk; forgive me! I had rather you knew the worst of me.”

“If that is the worst I am glad to know it,” said the Colonel. “It is a very natural feeling; to have been without it, would have proved you a different person from what I supposed. Now, tell me again; shall you stay here? you are still in your late friend’s house—what is to be done with it?—who does it belong to?—and during this little interval shall you stay here?”

“The Grange is *mine*,” said Roger, with a little pride; then he continued, with a slightly bitter smile—“next week everything is to be sold—*everything*—if they leave a wooden stool for poor old Sally in the kitchen, I will be grateful to them; but they cannot sell the Grange. It is entailed—I cannot sell it. Poor, dear old nest, it is the last wreck of all that ever belonged to the Musgraves;

everything but that is gone already; yes, though it is empty and desolate I shall stay, till I leave all, in my own house.”

“Then you are heir, not only of love, but at law,” said the Colonel, gravely.

Somehow that changed the aspect of affairs a little. Useless though it was, that old house, empty and desolate, it gave still an indisputable point of inheritance and ancestry, upon which the young outcast could set his foot. It seemed more and more impossible to the Colonel, whose mind was not free of romantic prejudices, and upon whose imagination this circumstance made a great impression, that the young man should be left to his own forlorn devices; and he grew more and more angry at the neighbouring people, who could suffer not only “a worthy youth” to enter the world under circumstances so unfriendly, but could also permit the total extinction of an old family, whom such a young man, once aided to begin, might well resuscitate. However, he wisely kept these thoughts to himself. He exacted a promise from Roger to do nothing without letting him know, and to wait until he should be able to obtain an answer from Sir John Armitage; but, above all, to keep him advised of where he was, and what he was doing—a promise which the youth gave with a slight reluctance. Then a cordial farewell passed between them. They parted like old friends—the young man with grateful affection, the old man with interest and kindness quite fatherly. They had never met till three days ago, yet however long they lived, neither could ever cease now to feel the warmest interest in the other. In the meantime, the Colonel put up this matter of Roger Musgrave in the bundle with his most particular concerns, and gave himself, with the most earnest gravity, to his voluntary task of aiding and helping this stranger, nothing doubting to succeed in it; while Roger, on the

other hand, went home to his solitary Grange, not knowing well what to make of it, struggling against the renewed hopes of his mind, fortifying himself against renewed disappointment by recalling his brief but sharp experience of the friendship of the world, and wondering whether he did right to trust, as he could not help trusting, the sincerity of his new friend. The young man paced in front of his house, among the dark trees, revolving over and over these questions which were of so much importance to him, and stimulated in all his hopes, without being aware of it, by that letter of his mother's, which he prized so much; and Colonel Sutherland sending out for paper, pens, and ink, and receiving in answer a dusty inkstand, a rusted steel pen, and two sheets of post paper highly glazed and with gilt edges, wiped his spectacles, lighted his low bedroom candle, that the light might suit his eyes, and sat down to write.

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