

THE LADIES LINDORES

IN THREE VOLUMES
VOL. I.

BY MRS OLIPHANT

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END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

"TWO OF THE SWEET'ST COMPANIONS IN THE WORLD."

—*Cymbeline*.

THE LADIES LINDORES.

CHAPTER I.

The mansion-house of Dalrulzian stands on the lower slope of a hill, which is crowned with a plantation of Scotch firs. The rugged outline of this wood, and the close-tufted mass of the tree-tops, stand out against the pale East, and protect the house below and the "policy," as the surrounding grounds are called in Scotland; so that though all the winds are sharp in that northern county, the sharpest of all is tempered. The house itself is backed by lighter foliage—a feathery grove of birches, a great old ash or two, and some tolerably well-grown, but less poetical, elms. It is a house of distinctively local character, with the curious, peaked, and graduated gables peculiar to Scotch rural architecture, and thick walls of the roughest stone, washed with a weather-stained coat of yellow-white. Two wings, each presenting a gabled end to the avenue, and a sturdy block of building retired between them,—all strong, securely built, as if hewn out of the rock, formed the homely house. It had little of the beauty which a building of no greater pretensions would probably have had in England. Below the wings, and in front of the hall-door, with its two broad flat stone steps, there was nothing better than a gravelled square, somewhat mossy in the corners, and marked by the trace of wheels; but round the south wing there swept a sort of terrace, known by no more dignified name than that of "The Walk," from which the ground sloped downwards, broken at a lower level by the formal little parterres of an old-fashioned flower-garden. The view from the Walk was of no very striking beauty, but it had the charm of breadth and distance—a soft sweep of undulating country, with an occasional glimpse of a lively trout-stream gleaming here and there

out of its covert of crags and trees, and a great, varied, and ever-changing world of sky,—not a prospect which captivated a stranger, but one which, growing familiar day by day and year by year, was henceforth missed like something out of their lives by the people who, being used to it, had learned to love that silent companionship of nature. It was the sort of view which a man pauses, not to look at but to see, even when he is pacing up and down his library thinking of John Thomson's demand for farm improvements, or, heavier thought, about his balance at his bankers: and which solaces the eyes of a tired woman, giving them rest and refreshment through all the vicissitudes of life. People sought it instinctively in moods of reflection, in moments of watching, at morning and at twilight, whenever any change was going on in that great exhaustless atmosphere, bounded by nothing but the pale distance of the round horizon,—and when was it that there was no change in that atmosphere?—clouds drifting, shadows flying, gleams of light like sudden revelations affording new knowledge of earth and heaven.

On the day on which the reader is asked first to visit this house of Dalrulzian, great things were happening in it. It was the end of one *régime* and the beginning of another. The master of the house, a young man who had been brought up at a distance, was coming home, and the family which had lived in it for years was taking its leave of the place.

The last spot which they visited and on which they lingered was the Walk. When the packing was over, the final remnants gathered up, the rooms left in that melancholy bareness into which rooms relapse when the prettinesses and familiarities of habitation have been swept away, the remaining members of the family came out with pensive faces, and stood together gazing somewhat wistfully

upon the familiar scene. They had looked on many that were more fair. They were going to a landscape of greater beauty further south—brighter, richer, warmer in foliage and natural wealth; but all this did not keep a certain melancholy out of their eyes. The younger of the party, Nora Barrington, cried a little, her lip quivering, a big tear or two running over. "It is foolish to feel it so much," her mother said. "How is it one feels it so much? I did not admire Dalrulzian at all when we came."

"Out of perversity," said her husband; but he did not smile even at the cleverness of his own remark.

Nora regarded her father with a sort of tender rage. "It is all very well for you," she said; "one place is the same as another to you. But I was such a little thing when we came here. To you it is one place among many; to me it is home."

"If you take it so seriously, Nora, we shall have you making up to young Erskine for the love of his house."

"Edward," cried Mrs Barrington in a tone of reproof, "I feel disposed to cry too. We have had a great many happy days in it. But don't let old Rolls see you crying, Nora. Here he is coming to say good-bye. When do you expect Mr Erskine, Rolls? You must tell him we were sorry not to see him; but he will prefer to find his house free when he returns. I hope he will be as happy at Dalrulzian as we have been since we came here."

"Wherefore would he no' be happy, mem? He is young and weel off: and you'll no' forget it's his own house."

Rolls had stepped out from one of the windows to take farewell of the family, whom he was sorry to lose, yet anxious to get rid of.

There was in him the satisfied air of the man who remains in possession, and whose habits are unaffected by the coming and going of ephemeral beings such as tenants. The Barringtons had been at Dalrulzian for more than a dozen years; but what was that to the old servant who had seen them arrive and saw them go away with the same imperturbable aspect? He stood relieved against the wall in his well-brushed black coat, concealing a little emotion under a watchful air of expectancy just touched with impatience. Rolls had condescended more or less to the English family all the time they had been there, and he was keeping up his *rôle* to the last, anxious that they should perceive how much he wanted to see them off the premises. Mrs Barrington, who liked everybody to like her, was vexed by this little demonstration of indifference; but the Colonel laughed. "I hope Mr Erskine will give you satisfaction," he said. "Come, Nora, you must not take root in the Walk. Don't you see that Rolls wishes us away?"

"Dear old Walk!" cried Nora; "dear Dalrulzian!" She rolled the *r* in the name, and turned the *z* into a *y* (which is the right way of pronouncing it), as if she had been to the manner born; and though an English young lady, had as pretty a fragrance of northern Scotland in her voice as could be desired. Rolls did not trust himself to look at this pretty figure lingering, drying wet eyes, until she turned round upon him suddenly, holding out her hands: "The moment we are off, before we are down the avenue, you will be wishing us back," she cried with vehemence; "you can't deceive *me*. You would like to cry too, if you were not ashamed," said the girl, with a smile and a sob, shaking the two half-unwilling hands she had seized.

"Me cry! I've never done that since I came to man's estate," cried Rolls indignantly, but after a suspicious pause. "As for wishing

you back, Miss Nora, wishing you were never to go,—wishing you would grow to the Walk, as the Cornel says——" This was so much from such a speaker, that he turned, and added in a changed tone, "You'll have grand weather for your journey, Cornel. But you must mind the twa ferries, and no' be late starting,"—a sudden reminder which broke up the little group, and made an end of the scene of leave-taking. It was the farewell volley of friendly animosity with which Rolls put a stop to his own perverse inclination to be soft-hearted over the departure of the English tenants. "He could not let us go without that parting shot," the "Cornel" said, as he put his wife into the jingling "coach" from the station, which, every better vehicle having been sent off beforehand, was all that remained to carry them away.

The Barringtons during their residence at Dalrulzian had been received into the very heart of the rural society, in which at first there had sprung up a half-grudge against the almost unknown master of the place, whose coming was to deprive them of a family group so pleasant and so bright. The tenants themselves, though their turn was over, felt instinctively as if they were expelled for the benefit of our intruder, and entertained this grudge warmly. "Mr Erskine might just as well have stayed away," Nora said. "He can't care about it as we do." Her mother laughed and chid, and shared the sentiment. "But then it's 'his ain place,' as old Rolls says." "And I daresay he thinks there is twice as much shooting," said the Colonel, complacently: "I did, when we came. He'll be disappointed, you'll see." This gave him a faint sort of satisfaction. In Nora's mind there was a different consolation, which yet was not a consolation, but a mixture of expectancy and curiosity, and that attraction which surrounds an unconscious enemy. She was going to make acquaintance with this supplanter, this innocent foe,

who was turning them out of their home because it was his home—the most legitimate reason. She was about to pay a series of visits in the country, to the various neighbours, who were all fond of her and reluctant to part with her. Perhaps her mother had some idea of the vague scheme of match-making which had sprung up in some minds, a plan to bring the young people together; for what could be more suitable than a match between John Erskine, the young master of Dalrulzian, who knew nothing about his native county, and Nora Barrington, who was its adopted child, and loved the old house as much as if she had been born in it? Mrs Barrington, perhaps, was not quite unconscious of this plan, though not a word had been said by any of these innocent plotters. For indeed what manner of man young Erskine was, and whether he was worthy of Nora, or in the least likely to please her, were things altogether unknown to the county, where he had not been seen for the last dozen years.

Anyhow he was coming as fast as the railway could carry him, while Nora took leave of her parents at the station. The young man then on his way was not even aware of her existence, though she knew all about him—or rather about his antecedents; for about John Erskine himself no one in the neighbourhood had much information. He had not set foot in the county since he was a boy of tender years and unformed character, whose life had been swallowed up in that of an alien family, of pursuits and ideas far separated from those of his native place. It almost seemed, indeed, as if it were far from a happy arrangement of Providence which made young John Erskine the master of this small estate in the North; or rather, perhaps, to mount a little higher, we might venture to say that it was a very embarrassing circumstance, and the cause of a great deal of confusion in this life that Henry

Erskine, his father, should have died when he did. Whatever might be the consequences of that step to himself, to others it could scarcely be characterised but as a mistake. That young man had begun to live an honest, wholesome life, as a Scotch country gentleman should; and if he had continued to exist, his wife would have been like other country gentlemen's wives, and his child, brought up at home, would have grown like the heather in adaptation to the soil. But when he was so ill advised as to die, confusion of every kind ensued. The widow was young, and Dalrulzian was solitary. She lived there, devoutly and conscientiously doing her duty, for some years. Then she went abroad, as everybody does, for that change of air and scene which is so necessary to our lives. And in Switzerland she met a clergyman, to whom change had also been necessary, and who was "taking the duty" in a mountain caravansary of tourists. What opportunities there are in such a position! She was pensive and he was sympathetic. He had a sister, whom she invited to Dalrulzian, "if she did not mind winter in the North;" and Miss Kingsford did not mind winter anywhere, so long as it was for her brother's advantage. The end was that Mrs Erskine became Mrs Kingsford, to the great though silent astonishment of little John, now eleven years old, who could not make it out. They remained at Dalrulzian for a year or two, for Mr Kingsford rather liked the shooting, and the power of asking a friend or two to share it. But at the end of that time he got a living—a good living; for events, whether good or evil, never come singly; and, taking John's interests into full consideration, it was decided that the best thing to be done was to let the house. Everybody thought this advisable, even John's old grand-aunt in Dunearn, of whom his mother was more afraid than of all her trustees put together. It was with fear and trembling that she had ventured to unfold this hesitating intention to the old lady.

"Mr Kingsford thinks"—and then it occurred to the timid little woman that Mr Kingsford's opinion as to the disposal of Henry Erskine's house might not commend itself to Aunt Barbara. "Mr Monypenny says," she added, faltering; then stopped and looked with alarm in Miss Erskine's face.

"What are you frightened for, my dear? Mr Kingsford has a right to his opinion, and Mr Monypenny is a very discreet person, and a capital man of business."

"They think—it would be a good thing for—John;—for, Aunt Barbara, he is growing a big boy,—we must be thinking of his education——"

"That's true," said the old lady, with the smile that was the grimmest thing about her. It was very uphill work continuing a laboured explanation under the light of this smile.

"And he cannot—be educated—here."

"Wherefore no? I cannot see that, my dear. His father was educated in Edinburgh, which is what I suppose you mean by *here*. Many a fine fellow's been bred up at Edinburgh College, I can tell you; more than you'll find in any other place I ever heard of. Eh! what ails you at Edinburgh? It's well known to be an excellent place for schools—schools of all kinds."

"Yes, Aunt Barbara. But then you know, John:—they say he will have such a fine position—a long minority and a good estate—they say he should have the best education that—England can give."

"You'll be for sending him to that idol of the English," said the old lady, "a public school, as they call it. As if all our Scotch schools

from time immemorial hadn't been public schools! Well, and after that——"

"It is only an idea," said little Mrs Kingsford, humbly—"not settled, nor anything like settled; but they say if I were to let the house——"

Aunt Barbara's grey eyes flashed; perhaps they were slightly green, as ill-natured people said. But she fired her guns in the air, so to speak, and once more grimly smiled. "I saw something very like all this in your wedding-cards, Mary," she said. "No, no, no apologies. I will not like to see a stranger in my father's house; but that's nothing, that's nothing. I will not say but it's very judicious; only you'll mind the boy's an Erskine, and here he'll have to lead his life. Mind and not make too much of an Englishman out of a Scotch lad, for he'll have to live his life here."

"Too much of an Englishman!" Mr Kingsford cried, when this conversation was reported to him. "I am afraid your old lady is an old fool, Mary. How could he be too much of an Englishman? Am *I* out of place here? Does not the greater breeding include the less?" he said, with his grand air. His wife did not always quite follow his meaning, but she always believed in it as something that merited understanding; and she was quite as deeply convinced as if she had understood. And accordingly the house was let to Colonel Barrington, who had not a "place" of his own, though his elder brother had, and the Kingsfords "went South" to their rectory, with which John's mother in particular was mightily pleased. It was in a far richer country than that which surrounded Dalrulzian,—a land flowing with milk and cheese, if not honey,—full of foliage and flowers. Mrs Kingsford, having been accustomed only to Scotland, was very much elated with the luxuriant beauty of the place. She

spoke of "England" as the travelled speak of Italy,—as if this climate of ours, which we abuse so much, was paradise. She thought "the English" so frank, so open, so demonstrative. To live in "the South" seemed the height of happiness to her. Innocent primitive Scotch gentlewomen are prone to talk in this way. Mr Kingsford, who knew better, and who himself liked to compare notes with people who winter in Italy, did what he could to check her exuberance, but she was too simple to understand why.

John, her son, did not share her feelings at first. John was generally confused and disturbed in his mind by all that had happened. He had not got over his wonder at the marriage, when he was carried off to this new and alien home. He did not say much. There was little opening by which he could communicate his feelings. He could not disapprove, being too young; and now that Mr Kingsford was always there, the boy had no longer the opportunity to influence his mother as, young as he was, he had hitherto done—"tyrannise over his mother," some people called it. All that was over. Much puzzled, the boy was dropped back into a properly subordinate position, which no doubt was much better for him; but it was a great change. To do him justice, he was never insubordinate; but he looked at his mother's husband with eyes out of which the perplexity never died. There was a permanent confusion ever after in his sense of domestic relationships, and the duty he owed to his seniors and superiors; for he never quite knew how it was that Mr Kingsford had become the master of his fate, though a certain innate pride, as well as his love of his mother, taught him to accept the yoke which he could not throw off. Mr Kingsford was determined to do his duty by John. He vowed when he gave the somewhat reluctant, proud little Scotsman—feeling himself at eleven too old to be kissed—a solemn embrace, that he

would do the boy "every justice." He should have the best education, the most careful guardianship; and Mr Kingsford kept his word. He gave the boy an ideal education from his own point of view. He sent him to Eton, and, when the due time came, to Oxford, and considered his advantage in every way; and it is needless to say, that as John grew up, the sensation of incongruity, the wonder that was in his mind as to this sudden interference with all the natural arrangements of his life, died away. It came to be a natural thing to him that Mr Kingsford should have charge of his affairs. And he went home to the rectory for the holidays to find now and then a new baby, but all in the quiet natural way of use and wont, with no longer anything that struck him as strange in his relationships. And yet he was put out of the natural current of his life. Boy as he was, he thought sometimes, not only of special corners in the woods, and turns of the stream, where he nibbled as a boy at the big sports, which are the life of men in the country—but above all, of the house, the landscape, the great sweep of land and sky, of which, when he shut his eyes, he could always conjure up a vague vision. He thought of it with a sort of grudge that it was not within his reach—keen at first, but afterwards very faint and slight, as the boy's sentiments died away in those of the man.

Meanwhile it was an excellent arrangement, who could doubt, for John's interest—instead of keeping up the place, to have a rent for it; and he had the most excellent man of business, who nursed his estate like a favourite child; so that when his minority was over, and Colonel Barrington's lease out, John Erskine was in a more favourable position than any one of his name had been for some generations. The estate was small. When his father died, exclusive of Mrs Erskine's jointure, there was not much more than a thousand a-year to come out of it; and on fifteen hundred a-year his

father had thought himself very well off, and a happy man. In the meantime, there had been accumulations which added considerably to this income, almost making up the sum which Mrs Kingsford enjoyed for her life. And John had always been treated at the rectory as a golden youth, happily exempted from all the uncertainty and the need of making his own way, which his stepfather announced, shaking his head, to be the fate of his own boys. Her eldest son, who was in "such a different position," was a great pride to Mrs Kingsford, even when it seemed to her half an injury that her other children should have no share in his happiness. But indeed she consoled herself by reflecting, an eldest son is always in a very different position; and no elder brother could have been kinder—voluntarily undertaking to send Reginald to Eton, "which was a thing we never could have thought of with no money," as soon as he came of age; and in every way comporting himself as a good son and brother.

There were, however, points in this early training which were bad for John. He acquired an exaggerated idea of the importance of this position of his. He was known both at school and college as a youth of property, the representative of a county family. These words mean more at Eton and Oxford than they require to do at Edinburgh or St Andrews. And in these less expensive precincts, Erskine of Dalrulzian would have been known for what he was. Whereas in "the South" nobody knew anything about the dimensions of his estate, or the limits of his income, and everybody supposed him a young north-country potentate, with perhaps a castle or two and unlimited "moors,"—who would be an excellent fellow to know as soon as he came into his own. This was John's own opinion in all these earlier days of youth. He did not know what his income was; and had he known, the figures

would not have meant anything particular to him. A thousand a-year seems to imply a great deal of spending to a youth on an allowance of three hundred; and he accepted everybody's estimate of his importance with pleased satisfaction. After all the explanations which followed his coming of age, he had indeed a touch of disenchantment and momentary alarm, feeling the details to be less splendid than he had expected. But Mr Monypenny evidently considered them anything but insignificant—and a man of his experience, the youth felt, was bound to know. He had gone abroad in the interval between leaving Oxford and coming "home" to take possession of his kingdom. He was not dissipated or extravagant, though he had spent freely. He was a good specimen of a young man of his time—determined that everything about him should be in "good form," and very willing to do his duty and be *bon prince* to his dependants. And he anticipated with pleasure the life of a country gentleman, such as he had seen it in his mother's neighbourhood, and in several houses of his college friends to which he had been invited. Sometimes, indeed, it would occur to him that his recollections of Dalrulzian were on a less extensive scale; but a boy's memory is always flattering to a home which he has not seen since his earliest years. Thus it was with a good deal of pleasant excitement that he set out from Milton Magna, his stepfather's rectory, where he had gone to see his mother and the children for a week or two on his return from the Continent. The season was just beginning; but John, full of virtue and hope, decided that he would not attempt to indulge in the pleasures of the season. Far better to begin his real life, to make acquaintance with his home and his "people," than to snatch a few balls and edge his way through a few crowded receptions, and feel himself nobody. This was not a thing which John much liked. He had been somebody all his life. Easter had been early that year, and

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