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**PAUL LEICESTER FORD**

# Janice Meredith



*Introduction by N. R. Teitel*

**COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED**

# JANICE MEREDITH

*A Story of the American Revolution*

PAUL LEICESTER FORD



AIRMONT

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GEORGE W. VANDEBILT

*My dear George,*

*Into the warp and woof of every book an author weaves much that even the subtlest readers cannot suspect, far less discern. To them it is but a cross and pile of threads interlaced to form a pattern which may please or displease their taste. But to the writer every filament has its own association: How each bit of silk or wool, flax or tow, was laboriously gathered, or was blown to him; when each was spun by the wheel of his fancy into yarns; the colour and tint his imagination gave to each skein; and where each was finally woven into the fabric by the shuttle of his pen. No thread ever quite detaches itself from its growth and spinning, dyeing and weaving, and each draws him back to hours and places seemingly unrelated to the work.*

*And so, as I have read the proofs of this book, I have found more than once that the pages have faded out of sight and in their stead I have seen Mount Pisgah and the French Broad River, or the ramp and terrace of Biltmore House, just as I saw them when writing the words which served to recall them to me. With the visions, too, has come a recurrence to our long talks, our work among the books, our games of chess, our cups of tea, our walks, our rides, and our drives. It is therefore a pleasure to me that the book so naturally gravitates to you, and that I may make it a remembrance of those past weeks of companionship, and an earnest of the present affection of*

PAUL LEICESTER FORD.

*This Special Paperback Edition of*  
JANICE MEREDITH  
*Is Dedicated to Marion Schechter*

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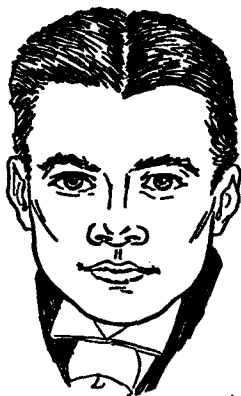
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# JANICE MEREDITH



PAUL LEICESTER FORD

## Introduction

Paul Leicester Ford and Miniver Cheevy . . . Miniver pined for Thebes and Camelot and the Medici, while Brooklyn-born Ford was obsessed with the tumultuous days of the Revolutionary War now long since past—alas! And out of his longing, he fashioned *Janice Meredith*, historical romance and chronicle of a more simple and spacious period when the world was new and America was promises. Entry into Ford's world is easy. Here are no philosophical ruminations, no buried motivations, no fragmented characters. His *dramatis personae* are pre-Freudian, and our jaded spirits are refreshed by their sheer energy and passionate commitments. Even so sacred and fabled a figure as George Washington is reduced to life-size and made ever so human. All with a conscious purpose: to enmesh the reader in the lives of human beings who *lived* the days, nights, and years of the Revolution. *Janice Meredith* is a historical romance. Its avowed purpose is to entertain. But it succeeds in doing so much more. It is an absorbing social, economic, and political document; an intimate diary, replete with homely details, of the lives of our ancestors. (We literally live in their homes, eat their food, wear their clothes.) In the light of these solid accomplishments, it would be ungenerous to cavil over structural lapses or occa-

sional patches of beribboned prose. The essential truth remains. And that is more important than any literary artifice.

Ford is novelist, historian, and military strategist all in one. His canvas is truly staggering, reaching from the early rumblings of colonial discontent to the final victory. Battles, sieges, evacuations, forced marches—all are graphically detailed, ringing with an authenticity that cannot be denied. (Ford's background and knowledge of the period is prodigious.) But primarily, our active participation is engaged because we *care* about the people involved. They range from bond servant to general, from publican to squire, from hired mercenary to patriot. All are etched indelibly as the tide of war surges over their interwoven lives. Basically, *Janice Meredith* is a predictable love story. But it is a love story embedded in the struggle and anguish of an emerging America—and that makes all the difference.

The opening chapter of *Janice Meredith* is entitled, most aptly, *A Heroine of Many Possibilities*. Janice is a mere fifteen, a quixotic fifteen, dreaming of love and romance. Outwardly, she will conform to every moral and social tenet established by a bigoted, provincial society; but inwardly, the seeds of her independence are evidenced immediately. And in tracing that emerging independence, we share willingly the high adventures—both in love and in war—of a spirited, delightful woman. Janice is always aware of her indubitable charms. She uses them with a wisdom beyond her years. Her father, the irascible squire, is putty in her hands. One forced tear, and all is forgiven. Only her mother knows. But Mother is martyred by religion and silenced with a quick kiss. Still, in another place and in another time, Janice might have languished into respectable anonymity despite her unusual endowments. But revolution is in the air—and besides, there *was* the bond servant.

With the dramatic entrance of Charles Fownes—later General Jack Bereton—into the squire's home, Janice's complicated, amorous adventures begin. Fownes, an indentured servant, possesses most of the credentials of a Heathcliff. Sullen, hot-tempered, and handsome, he is shrouded in an aura of mystery that both baffles and intrigues our not-so-demure heroine. Moreover, her interest in the enigmatic Mr. Fownes is further piqued by his occasional lapses into gentlemanly speech and behavior. In the meantime, she must contend with the inarticulate wooing of

Philemon Hennion—kind, steadfast, and boring. He is her father's choice for reasons more tangible than mere love. To escape marriage to Philemon, Janice—utterly perplexed and bewildered—consents to an elopement with John Evatt, another gentleman of mysterious origin. She is saved from a fate worse than death by the dashing bondsman, now an intrepid warrior in the colonial army. Janice's humiliation is short-lived. The pressures of war come to her aid. Suddenly her talents are needed for such mundane tasks as foraging for food and shelter. In the process, she grows up. Even the redoubtable squire, stripped of his prosperous farm, leans heavily upon her. In the happy ending, she marries General Bereton with George Washington's blessing. Her career has spanned the Revolutionary War. She has survived. And so has her father. But their survival is due in no small measure to her amazing ability to garner material benefits even from her rejected suitors. An extraordinary woman in any age!

In Squire Meredith, Ford succeeds admirably in giving us a full-length portrait of the colonial Tory. The squire is almost a stock figure—bluff, rambunctious, something of a buffoon. But there is nothing ludicrous about his unflagging zeal in devising schemes to retain his possessions. Where money is concerned, he is in deadly earnest. Even his darling daughter is used as bait when catastrophe seems imminent. His unswerving loyalty to the king is based on hard cash rather than on any real conviction. A victory for the rebels will mean a drastic loss of rents. Therefore, the *status quo* must be preserved at any cost. The squire is not atypical. Many of the landed gentry had not read Thomas Paine. Ford does not judge our noble squire; he merely presents him. He does, however, make him suffer every possible misfortune and indignity. (At one point, our doughty hero is even tarred and feathered!) Grudgingly, Squire Meredith does succeed in wresting a smidgen of sympathy from us. He does suffer a bit overmuch. Even a Lucifer is worthy of a touch of grace.

Ford's historical objectivity does not permit deification of all the embattled publicans, tenant farmers, and clerks who constituted the bulk of Washington's raggle-taggle army. Undoubtedly, patriotism motivated most of them. But for some the war served as a miraculous opportunity for quick riches and self-aggrandizement. Ford makes this abundantly clear in his characterization

of Joe Bagby. Mr. Bagby's sterling patriotism stems from such salutary motives as jealousy and greed. He is matched by John Evatt, who operates on the other side of the fence. Mr. Evatt, a cultivated, sophisticated gentleman, is ostensibly loyal to the king. But his loyalty, too, is based on solidly crass motives. A delightful pair, but most essential to Ford's panoramic landscape.

*Janice Meredith* is a novel to be savored. It is redolent of history. Touch any page and a cherished, bygone age springs to life.

Nathan R. Teitel  
New York University

## 1 § A Heroine of Many Possibilities

*"Alonzo now once more found himself upon an element that had twice proved destructive to his happiness, but Neptune was propitious, and with gentle breezes wafted him toward his haven of bliss, toward Amaryllis. Alas, when but one day from happiness, a Moorish zebec—"*

"Janice!" called a voice.

The effect on the reader and her listener, both of whom were sitting on the floor, was instantaneous. Each started and sat rigidly intent for a moment; then, as the sound of approaching footsteps became audible, one girl hastily slipped a little volume under the counterpane of the bed, while the other sprang to her feet, and in a hurried, flustered way pretended to be getting something out of a tall wardrobe.

Before the one who hid the book had time to rise, a woman of fifty entered the room, and after a glance, cried:—

"Janice Meredith! How often have I told thee that it is ungenteel for a female to repose on the floor?"

"Very often, mommy," said Janice, rising meekly, meantime casting a quick glance at the bed, to see how far its smoothness had been disturbed.

"And still thee continues such unbecoming and vastly indelicate behaviour."

"Oh, mommy, but it is so nice!" cried the girl. "Didn't you like to sit on the floor when you were fifteen?"

"Janice, thou 't more careless every day in bed-making," ejaculated Mrs. Meredith, making a sudden dive toward the bed, as if she desired to escape the question. She smoothed the gay patchwork quilt, seemed to feel something underneath, and the next moment pulled out the hidden volume, which was bound, as the bookseller's advertisements phrased it, in "half calf, neat, marbled sides." One stern glance she gave the two red-faced culprits, and, opening the book, read out in a voice that was in itself an impeachment, "The Adventures of Alonzo and Amaryllis!"

There was an instant's silence, full of omen to the culprits, and then Mrs. Meredith's wrath found vent.

"Janice Meredith!" she cried. "On a Sabbath morning, when thee shouldst be setting thy thoughts in a fit order for church! And thou, Tabitha Drinker!"

"It's all my fault, Mrs. Meredith," hurriedly asserted Tabi-

tha. "I brought the book with me from Trenton, and 't was I suggested that we go on reading this morning."

"Six hours of spinet practice thou shalt have to-morrow, miss," announced Mrs. Meredith to her daughter, "and this afternoon thou shalt say over the whole catechism. As for thee, Tabitha, I shall feel it my duty to write thy father of his daughter's conduct. Now hurry and make ready for church." And Mrs. Meredith started to leave the room.

"Oh, mommy," cried Janice, springing forward and laying a detaining hand on her mother's arm in an imploring manner, "punish me as much as you please,—I know 't was very, very wicked,—but don't take the book away! He and Amaryllis were just—"

"Not another sight shalt thou have of it, miss. My daughter reading novels, indeed!" and Mrs. Meredith departed, holding the evil book gingerly between her fingers, much as one might carry something that was liable to soil one's hands.

The two girls looked at each other, Tabitha with a woe-begone expression, and Janice with an odd one, which might mean many things. The flushed cheeks were perhaps due to guilt, but the tightly clinched little fists were certainly due to anger, and, noting these two only, one would have safely affirmed that Janice Meredith, meekly as she had taken her mother's scolding, had a quick and hot temper. But the eyes were fairly starry with some emotion, certainly not anger, and though the lips were pressed tightly together, the feeling that had set them so rigidly was but a passing one, for suddenly the corners twitched, the straight lines bent into curves, and flinging herself upon the tall four-poster bedstead, Miss Meredith laughed as only fifteen can laugh.

"Oh, Tibbie, Tibbie," she presently managed to articulate, "if you look like that I shall die," and as the god of Momus once more seized her, she dragged the quilt into a rumpled pile, and buried her face in it, as if indeed attempting to suffocate herself.

"But, Janice, to think that we shall never know how it ended! I couldn't sleep last night for hours, because I was so afraid that Amaryllis wouldn't have the opportunity to vindicate herself to—and 't would have been finished in another day."

"And a proper punishment for naughty Tibbie Drinker it is," declared Miss Meredith, sitting up and assuming a judicially severe manner. "What do you mean, miss, by tempting good little Janice Meredith into reading a wicked romance on Sunday?"

"Good little Janice!" cried Tibbie, contemptuously. "I could slap thee for that." But instead she threw her arms about Janice's neck and kissed her with such rapture and energy as

to overbalance the judge from an upright position, and the two rolled over upon the bed laughing with anything but discretion, considering the nearness of their mentor. As a result a voice from a distance called sharply:—

"Janice!"

"O gemini!" cried the owner of that name, springing off the bed and beginning to unfasten her gown,—an example promptly followed by her room-mate.

"Art thou dressing, child?" called the voice, after a pause.

"Yes, mommy," answered Janice. Then she turned to her friend and asked, "Shall I wear my light chintz and kenton kerchief, or my purple and white striped Persian?"

"Sufficiently smart for a country lass, Jan," cried her friend.

"Don't call me country bred, Tibbie Drinker, just because you are a modish city girl."

"And why not thy blue shalloon?"

"T is vastly unbecoming."

"Janice Meredith! Can't thee let the men alone?"

"I will when they will," airily laughed the girl.

"Do unto others—" quoted Tabitha.

"Then I will when thee sets me an example," retorted Janice, making a deep curtsy, the absence of drapery and bodice revealing the straightness and suppleness of the slender rounded figure, which still had as much of the child as of the woman in its lines.

"Little thought they get from me," cried Tabitha, with a toss of her head.

"Tell we where is fancy bred,  
In the heart or in the head?"

hummed Janice. "Of course, one doesn't think about men, Mistress Tabitha. One feels." Which remark showed perception of a feminine truth far in advance of Miss Meredith's years.

"Unfeeling Janice!"

"T is a good thing for the oafs and ploughboys of Brunswick. For there are none better."

"Philemon Hennion?"

"Your servant, marms," mimicked Janice, catching up a hair brush and taking it from her head as if it were a hat, while making a bow with her feet widely spread. "Having nothing better ter do, I've made bold ter come over ter drink a dish of tea with you." The girl put the brush under her arm, still further spread her feet, put her hands behind some pretended coat-tails, let the brush slip from under her arms, so that it fell to the floor with a racket, stooped with an affectation of clumsiness which seemed impossible to the lithe figure, while mumbling

something inarticulate in an apparent paroxysm of embarrassment,—which quickly became a genuine inability to speak from laughter.

"Janice, thee should turn actress."

"Oh, Tibbie, lace my bodice quickly, or I shall burst of laughing," breathlessly begged the girl.

"Janice," said her mother, entering, "how often must I tell thee that giggling is missish? Stop, this moment."

"Yes, mommy," gasped Janice. Then she added, after a shriek and a wriggle, "Don't, Tabitha!"

"What ails thee now, child? Art going to have an attack of the megrims?"

"When Tibbie laces me up she always tickles me, because she knows I'm dreadfully ticklish."

"I can't ever make the edges of the bodice meet, so I tickle to make her squirm," explained Miss Drinker.

"Go on with thy own dressing, Tabitha," ordered Mrs. Meredith, taking the strings from her hand. "Now breathe out, Janice."

Miss Meredith drew a long breath, and then expelled it, instant advantage being taken by her mother to strain the strings. "Again," she said, holding all that had been gained, and the operation was repeated, this time the edges of the frock meeting across the back.

"It hurts," complained the owner of the waist, panting, while the upper part of her bust rose and fell rapidly in an attempt to make up for the crushing of the lower lungs.

"I lose all patience with thee, Janice," cried her mother. "Here when thou hast been given by Providence a waist that would be the envy of any York woman, that thou shouldst object to clothes made to set it off to a proper advantage."

"It hurts all the same," reiterated Janice; "and last year I could beat Jacky Whitehead, but now when I try to run in my new frocks I come nigh to dying of breathlessness."

"I should hope so!" exclaimed her mother. "A female of fifteen run with a boy, indeed! The very idea is indelicate. Now, as soon as thou hast put on thy slippers and goloe-shoes, go to thy father, who has been told of thy misbehaviour, and who will reprove thee for it." And with this last damper on the "lightness of young people," as Mrs. Meredith phrased it, she once more left the room. It is a regrettable fact that Miss Janice, who had looked the picture of submission as her mother spoke, made a mouth, which was far from respectful, at the departing figure.

"Oh, Janice," said Tabitha, "will he be very severe?"

"Severe?" laughed Janice. "If dear dadda is really angry, I'll let tears come into my eyes, and then he'll say he's sorry he hurt my feelings, and kiss me; but if he's only doing it to please