

**AILIEFORD. A FAMILY
HISTORY. IN THREE
VOLUMES. VOL. I**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649747696

Ailieford. A Family History. In Three Volumes. Vol. I by Margaret Oliphant

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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MARGARET OLIPHANT

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VOLUMES. VOL. I**

AILIEFORD.

A FAMILY HISTORY.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "JOHN DRAYTON."

"JAQUES. It is a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects, and, indeed, the sundry contemplation of my travels, in which my often ruminations wraps me in a most humorous sadness.

"ROSALIND. A traveller! By my faith, you have great reason to be sad: I fear, you have sold your own lands, to see other men's; then, to have seen much, and to have nothing, is to have rich eyes and poor hands.

"JAQUES. Yes, I have gained my experience."—AS YOU LIKE IT.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,

SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN,

13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1853.

Novels



249. w. 365.

LONDON:
Printed by Schulze and Co., 13, Poland Street.

A I L I E F O R D.

CHAPTER I.

EVERY man has his own report to make of this wonderful human life which we live day by day unconsciously, forming history unawares. I do not expect that my experience contains anything more remarkable than the experience of other men—still it is individual. I have reached to an unusual quietness now, and more rest and leisure than I quite know what to do with; and if one

cannot work one may talk—it is the privilege of an old man.

The house in which I am now living was once a farm-house ; when, I cannot remember, but all its arrangements corroborate its history. A two-story house, with a rounded projection in its centre to contain the staircase, a low door opening into the little brick-floored kitchen, and a collection of low small-windowed rooms within. Outside, the garden is in but indifferent order, noted for little more than the great white rose-tree looking in at the staircase window, and the hedge of lilacs round the enclosure, which has much more wealth in potatoes and cabbages than in flowers ; and some jargonel pear-trees, wonderful in their generation, and berry-bushes, famous and well-remembered, keeping a corner in many an old world-hardened memory, of greyheaded men like me who were young when I was young.

For I was born here, and in this very

room my mother had her parlour. We were three of us, boys; and had for our father a man, not blameless by any means, but whose faults were institutions with us, parts of himself which it never occurred to us to speculate upon. Our income, I suppose, might be about a hundred pounds a-year—certainly not more; and upon this, the family of us in the parlour, and Marget, strong and ruddy, in the kitchen, lived with singular comfort. I recollect no appearance of pinching or penury about our domestic life, and we were moulds of fashion in respect to bonnets and jackets for half the school. True my mother came to a dead stop sometimes, opposite a small account, and pondered with painful calculations over the means of paying it; but it always was paid—and we boys had the most perfect trust in the immense capabilities of the family income.

We went to school at Moulisburgh, a

cheerful little town on the coast, three miles from home; and at six o'clock in the morning, in all weathers, we set out with our satchels and fresh faces from Ailieford. Andrew had a magnificent camlet cloak with a collar of lambskin and a brass hook-and-eye, worthy to have fastened the garments of a giant; and I recollect for my own habiliments, some time after, a long white great-coat with tails; but how Jamie and I fared in rainy days at that time I forget now—though it is impossible to forget Andrew's camlet cloak.

In the neighbourhood of our humble house, stood a great old decayed and decaying mansion, grand and dilapidated, with immense blocked-up, ruined staircases which no one attempted to ascend, and a wilderness of vacant windows staring out like blank idiot eyes upon a prospect which I, for my own part, have seldom seen equalled. For Edinburgh, with its couched lion, with its

castle, and spires, and pillars, and wimple of grey mist, lay before us, within reach even of our parlour windows, over many a slope of fertile land, lying close at our door; and when we ran with resounding feet down the brae with its avenue of trees, past Allieford house, to reach the high-road, the Firth burst upon us—the noble, unlaborious Firth, which lives on its beauties and its memories. At that time, great was our reverence for the passing schooner which threw a speck of white upon its breadth of water; and a warship, now and then, on its way to Leith, produced a fever of excitement among us, and sent us down to the links in bands when school-hours were over, almost forgetful of the adjourned game of shinty; and for our parts, the three brothers of us—though we had appetites anything but inconsiderable—entirely eclipsing the dinner which waited us at home.

At Ailieford our playmates were sturdy