

**THE RAILWAY MAN AND
HIS CHILDREN. IN THREE
VOLUMES. VOL. III**

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The Railway Man and His Children. In Three Volumes. Vol. III by Margaret Oliphant

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MARGARET OLIPHANT

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HIS CHILDREN

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT

AUTHOR OF "HESTER," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III

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THE RAILWAY MAN

AND

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CHAPTER I

ARCHIE had not remarked at all the incident which had startled Johnson, and which Eddy Saumarez, alone at present among the relics of the supper, and making a final meal with considerable appetite, was going over and over in his eager and fertile mind, trying to make out its meaning, and in what way it could affect himself, and on the course he ought to pursue. The man in the overcoat, closely buttoned up, coming suddenly out of the cold outside to the lighted and dazzling ball-room, with his pale face and startled air, was as a picture to the mind of Eddy, full of innumerable suggestions and possible fate: but it would have conveyed no idea at all to the intelligence of Archie even had he perceived it. Somebody about business; if not, as was most likely, some invited guest who

had not caught the boat, or had been otherwise detained on the way, was all the son of the house would have thought of. Somebody about business did not mean much to Archie. It could have, he would have been quite sure, nothing whatever to do with him.

The hall in which the dancing took place was separated from the great door by a vestibule and inner door, chiefly made of glass, and half-covered by heavy curtains. The stranger, when he jumped from the dogcart which had brought him round the loch, a long *détour*, had pushed into the vestibule, finding it open and no servants visible. There had been a general withdrawal both of the servants of the house and the many strange footmen, who had attended the guests, to the servants' hall, where a supper was going on, quite as merry, and not much less luxurious, than the other supper in the dining-room: and at this moment there was nobody about to direct the visitor. He had accordingly, his business being urgent, opened the glass door, to find himself in the ball-room, as has been already described. He stood there much surprised, looking round him for some one who could direct him to the master of the house. And, as luck would have it, the master of the house himself was the first to perceive this curious apparition in the midst of his guests. At that end of the hall none of the usual loiterers were standing about. They were all at the other end and along the upper sides of the ball-room, which were free from those draughts which,

as the elder people confided to each other, can never be quite shut out from a room so close to the open air. Mr. Rowland made his way through the dancers, dodging here and there a quickly gyrating pair, with a smile upon his face, towards the man in the greatcoat, who stood helplessly at the door not knowing what to do. He held out his cordial hand to him as if he had been the most welcome of visitors. "I don't remember your face," he said, "excuse me; and you're very late: but the fun, as you see, is still going on."

The newcomer stared at him, with his lips apart. "You are Mr. Rowland?" he said.

"Well, yes, naturally," said the good-humoured host, with a laugh; "it appears you don't know me any more than I know you."

"I'm from the Bank of Scotland—the Glasgow branch," said the stranger. "I have come, if you please, with a private communication from the manager, very important. If I could speak a word to you by yourself——"

"The Bank of Scotland! Then you have not come to the ball?" said Rowland.

The newcomer looked round with a glance of admiration and awe. He was a young man, and he thought it a scene of enchantment, though his Scotch pride was too great to permit any desire to intrude himself into that dazzling assembly. He drew himself up a little and replied, "I have nothing to do with the ball. I knew nothing about it. I have driven round the head of the loch, a very long