

**UNCLE JOHN
: A NOVEL**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649138258

Uncle John : a novel by G. J. Whyte-Melville

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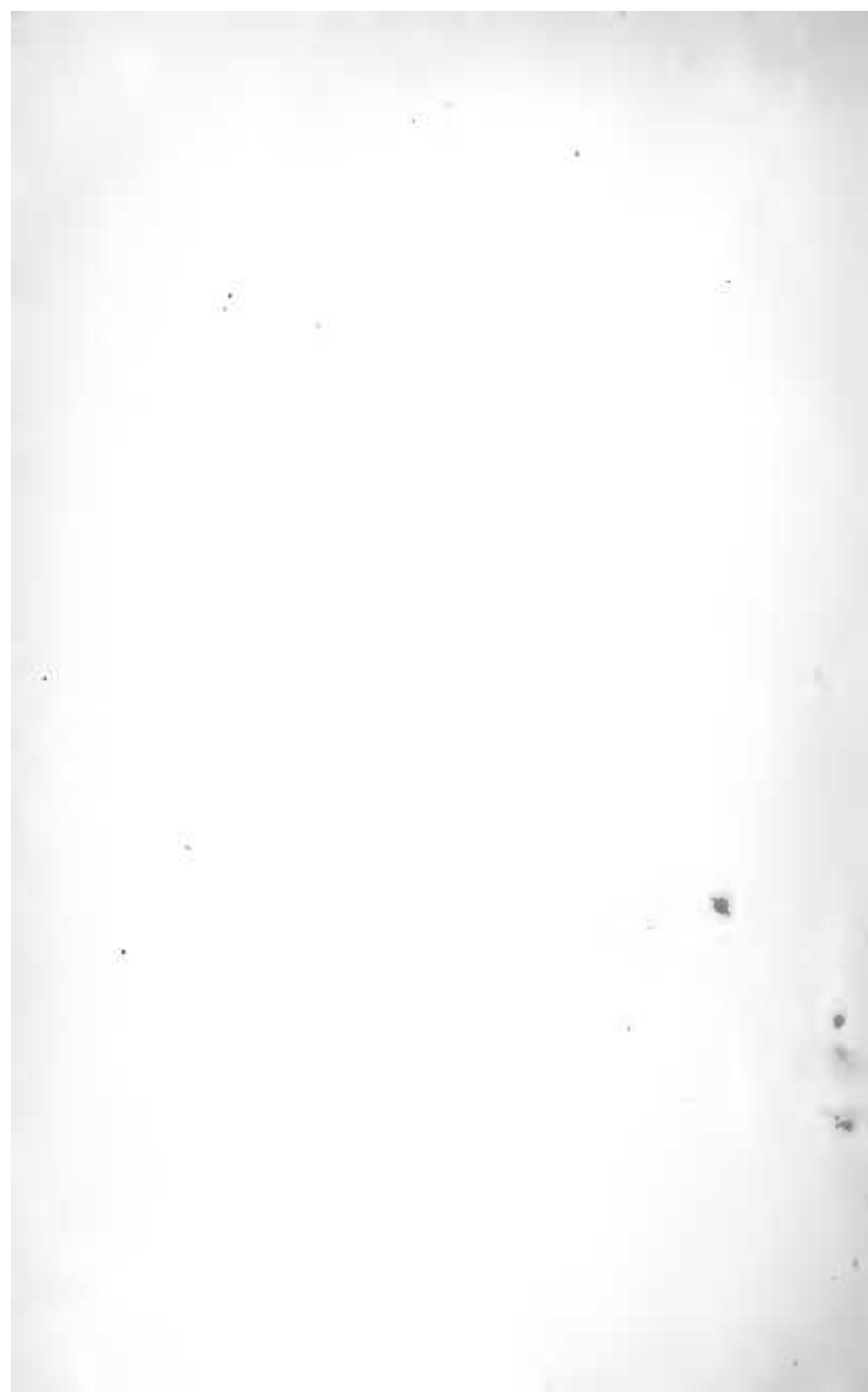
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G. J. WHYTE-MELVILLE

**UNCLE JOHN
: A NOVEL**



UNCLE JOHN.

UNCLE JOHN.

A Novel.

BY

G. J. WHYTE-MELVILLE,

AUTHOR OF

"MARKET HARBOURGH," "THE GLADIATORS," "KATE COVENTRY,"
"SATANELLA," ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON :

CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.

1874.

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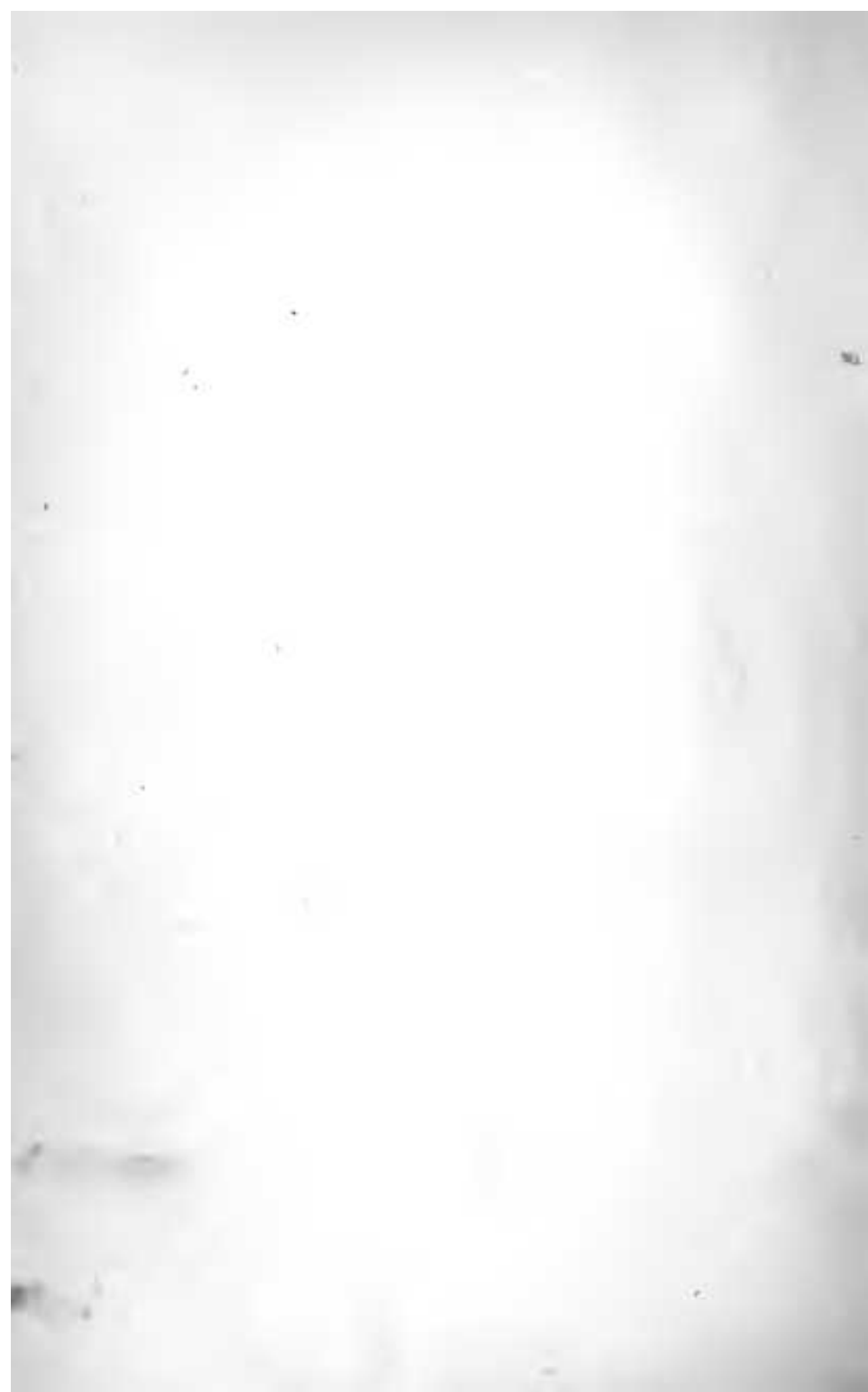
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UNCLE JOHN.

Me forthinketh, said King Pellinore, this shall betide, but
God may well foredoe destiny.—*Morte d'Arthur.*

CHAPTER I.

THE LETTER-BOX.

OF all taxes levied on friendship few are so galling as the *corvée* that compels a guest to inspect and admire the house in which he is entertained. To follow your host, with wet feet, and hands in pockets, round the stables, the kennel, the farm, and, worse still, the kitchen-garden, may well create a doubt that you had better have stayed away; but this becomes a certainty when, in dismal attics and cheerless corridors, you stumble

against a coal-box or are brought up with your head in a housemaid's closet. I will not ask my reader, therefore, to accompany me beyond the hall of a comfortable country-house in one of the midland counties; a hall well warmed and ventilated, where a good fire burns opposite the glass door that looks out upon the lawn. It seems to blaze the more cheerfully that a hard frost has bound the whole country in misery and iron. The leafless hedges stand stiff and bristling with frozen rime, the bare trees in the park are clearly cut against a dull grey sky, the very grass crackles under the postman's foot, and that functionary would seem to be the only moving creature in the parish but for an inquisitive robin, in a bright red waistcoat, with his head on one side, who hops and jerks restlessly across the gravel in front of the hall-door.

In consequence of the postman's arrival, a well-dressed free-and-easy butler emerges from certain back-passages and corridors, bringing a draught of cold air with him, and proceeds to unlock the letter-box that stands