

**THE ATHELINGS**  
**OR**  
**THE THREE GIFTS**

VOL. III

BY MARGARET OLIPHANT

## **Table of Contents**

- BOOK III.—CHAPTER I. AN OLD STORY.  
CHAPTER II. A CRISIS.  
CHAPTER III. CHARLIE'S PREPARATIONS.  
CHAPTER IV. GOING AWAY.  
CHAPTER V. THE OLD WOOD HOUSE.  
CHAPTER VI. AN ADVENTURER.  
CHAPTER VII. LORD WINTERBOURNE.  
CHAPTER VIII. THE NEW HEIR.  
CHAPTER IX. A VISIT.  
CHAPTER X. MARIAN ON TRIAL.  
CHAPTER XI. DISCONTENT.  
CHAPTER XII. A CONVERSATION.  
CHAPTER XIII. SUSPENSE.  
CHAPTER XIV. NEWS.  
CHAPTER XV. GOING HOME.  
CHAPTER XVI. NEW INFLUENCES.  
CHAPTER XVII. RACHEL'S DOUBTS.  
CHAPTER XVIII. AGNES.  
CHAPTER XIX. LIONEL.  
CHAPTER XX. AN ARRIVAL.  
CHAPTER XXI. CHARLIE'S RETURN.

CHAPTER XXII. CHARLIE'S REPORT.  
CHAPTER XXIII. PROCRASTINATION.  
CHAPTER XXIV. THE FOGGOS.  
CHAPTER XXV. GOOD FORTUNE.  
CHAPTER XXVI. THE OXFORD ASSIZES.  
CHAPTER XXVII. THE TRUE HEIR.  
CHAPTER XXVIII. AT HOME.  
CHAPTER XXIX. THE RIVAL HEIRS.  
CHAPTER XXX. AN ADVENTURE.  
CHAPTER XXXI. THE TRIAL.  
CHAPTER XXXII. ESPOUSALS.  
CHAPTER XXXIII. AN OLD FRIEND.  
CHAPTER XXXIV. SETTLING DOWN.  
CHAPTER XXXV. THE END.

“I’ the cave wherein they bow, their thoughts do hit  
The roofs of palaces; and nature prompts them,  
In simple and low things, to prince it much  
Beyond the trick of others.”

CYMBELINE

# **THE ATHELINGS.**

## **BOOK III.—CHAPTER I.**

### **AN OLD STORY.**

“Now, mother,” said Charlie, “I’m in real earnest. My father would tell me himself if he were here. I want to understand the whole concern.”

Mrs Atheling and her son were in Charlie’s little room, with its one small lattice-window, overshadowed and embowered in leaves—its plain uncurtained bed, its small table, and solitary chair. Upon this chair, with a palpitating heart, sat Mrs Atheling, and before her stood the resolute boy.

And she began immediately, yet with visible faltering and hesitation, to tell him the story she had told the girls of the early connection between the present Lord Winterbourne and the Atheling family. But Charlie’s mind was excited and preoccupied. He listened, almost with impatience, to the sad little romance of his father’s young sister, of whom he had never heard before. It did not move him at all as it had moved Agnes and Marian. Broken hearts and disappointed loves were very far out of Charlie’s way; something entirely different occupied his own imagination. He broke forth with a little effusion of impatience when the story came to an end. “And is this all? Do you mean to say this is the whole, mother? And my father had never anything to do with him but through a girl!”

“You are very unfeeling, Charlie,” said Mrs Atheling, who wiped her eyes with real emotion, yet with a little policy too, and to gain time. “She was a dear innocent girl, and your father was

very fond of her—reason enough to give him a dislike, if it were not sinful, to the very name of Lord Winterbourne.”

“I had better go on with my packing, then,” said Charlie. “So, that was all? I suppose any scamp in existence might do the same. Do you really mean to tell me, mother, that there was nothing but this?”

Mrs Atheling faltered still more under the steady observation of her son. “Charlie,” said his mother, with agitation, “your father never would mention it to any one. I may be doing very wrong. If he only were here himself to decide! But if I tell you, you must give me your word never so much as to hint at it again.”

Charlie did not give the necessary pledge, but Mrs Atheling made no pause. She did not even give him time to speak, however he might have been inclined, but hastened on in her own disclosure with agitation and excitement. “You have heard Papa tell of the young gentleman—he whom you all used to be so curious about—whom your father did a great benefit to,” said Mrs Atheling, in a breathless hurried whisper. “Charlie, my dear, I never said it before to any creature—that was *him*.”

She paused only a moment to take breath. “It was before we knew how he had behaved to dear little Bride,” she continued, still in haste, and in an undertone. “What he did was a forgery—a forgery! people were hanged for it then. It was either a bill, or a cheque, or something, and Mr Reginald had written to it another man’s name. It happened when Papa was in the bank, and before old Mr Lombard died—old Mr Lombard had a great kindness for your father, and we had great hopes then—and by good fortune the thing was brought to Papa. Your father was always very quick,

Charlie—he found it out in a moment. So he told old Mr Lombard of it in a quiet way, and Mr Lombard consented he should take it back to Mr Reginald, and tell him it was found out, and hush all the business up. If your papa had not been so quick, Charlie, but had paid the money at once, as almost any one else would have done, it all must have been found out, and he would have been hanged, as certain as anything—he, a haughty young gentleman, and a lord’s son!”

“And a very good thing, too,” exclaimed Charlie; “saved him from doing any more mischief. So, I suppose now, it’s all my father’s blame.”

“This Lord Winterbourne is a bad man,” said Mrs Atheling, taking no notice of her son’s interruption: “first he was furious to William, and then he cringed and fawned to him; and of course he had it on his conscience then about poor little Bride, though we did not know—and then he raved, and said he was desperate, and did not know what to do for money. Your father came home to me, quite unhappy about him; for he belonged to the same country, and everybody tried to make excuses for Mr Reginald, being a young man, and the heir. So William made it up in his own mind to go and tell the old lord, who was in London then. The old lord was a just man, but very proud. He did not take it kind of William, and he had no regard for Mr Reginald; but for the honour of the family he sent him away. Then we lost sight of him long, and Aunt Bridget took a dislike to us, and poor little Bride was dead, and we never heard anything of the Lodge or the Hall for many a year; but the old lord died abroad, and Mr Reginald came home Lord Winterbourne. That was all we ever knew. I thought your father had quite forgiven him, Charlie—we had other things to think of than keeping up old grudges—when all at once it came to be in the

newspapers that Lord Winterbourne was a political man, that he was making speeches everywhere, and that he was to be one of the ministry. When your father saw that, he blazed up into such an anger! I said all I could, but William never minded me. He never was so bitter before, not even when we heard of little Bride. He said, Such a man to govern us and all the people!—a forger! a liar!—and sometimes, I think, he thought he would expose the whole story, and let everybody know.”

“Time enough for that,” said Charlie, who had listened to all this without comment, but with the closest attention. “What he did once he’ll do again, mother; but we’re close at his heels this time, and he won’t get off now. I’m going to Oxford now to get some books. I say, mother, you’ll be sure, upon your honour, not to tell the girls?”

“No, Charlie,” said Mrs Atheling, with a somewhat faint affirmation; “but, my dear, I can’t believe in it. It can’t be true. Charlie, boy! if this was coming true, our Marian—your sister, Charlie!—why, Marian would be Lady Winterbourne!”

Charlie did not say a word in return; he only took down his little travelling-bag, laid it at his mother’s feet to be packed, and left her to that business and her own meditations; but after he had left the room, the lad returned again and thrust in his shaggy head at the door. “Take care of Marian, mother,” said Charlie, in a parting adjuration; “remember my father’s little sister Bride.”

So he went away, leaving Mrs Atheling a good deal disquieted. She had got over the first excitement of Miss Anastasia’s great intelligence and the sudden preparations of Charlie. She had scarcely time enough, indeed, to give a thought to these things,

when her son demanded this history from her, and sent her mind away into quite a different channel. Now she sat still in Charlie's room, pondering painfully, with the travelling-bag lying quite unheeded at her feet. At one moment she pronounced the whole matter perfectly impossible—at the next, triumphantly inconsequent, she leaped to the full consummation of the hope, and saw her own pretty Marian—dazzling vision!—the lady of Winterbourne! and again the heart of the good mother fell, and she remembered little Bride. Louis, as he was now, having no greater friends than their own simple family, and no pretensions whatever either to birth or fortune, was a very different person from that other Louis who might be heir of lands and lordship and the family pride of the Riverses. Much perplexed, in great uncertainty and pain, mused Mrs Atheling, half-resentful of that grand discovery of Miss Anastasia, which might plunge them all into renewed trouble; while Charlie trudged into Oxford for his Italian grammar—and Louis and Marian wandered through the enchanted wood, drawing homeward—and Rachel sang to the children—and Agnes wondered by herself over the secret which was to be confided only to Mamma.

## CHAPTER II.

### A CRISIS.

THAT night Charlie had need of all his diplomatic talents. Before he returned from Oxford, his mother, by way of precaution lest Agnes should betray the sudden and mysterious visit of Miss Anastasia to Marian, contrived to let her elder daughter know mysteriously, something of the scope and object of the sudden journey for which it was necessary to prepare her brother, driving Agnes, as was to be supposed, into a very fever of suppressed excitement, joy, triumph, and anxiety. Mrs Atheling, conscious, hurried, and studying deeply not to betray herself—and Agnes, watching every one, stopping questions, and guarding off suspicions with prudence much too visible—were quite enough of themselves to rouse every other member of the little company to lively pursuit after the secret. Charlie was assailed by every shape and form of question: Where was he going—what was he to do? He showed no cleverness, we are bound to acknowledge, in evading these multitudinous interrogations; he turned an impenetrable front upon them, and made the most commonplace answers, making vast incursions all the time into Hannah's cakes and Mamma's bread-and-butter.

“He had to go back immediately to the office; he believed he had got a new client for old Foggo,” said Charlie, with the utmost coolness; “making no secret of it at all,” according to Mamma's indignant commentary.

“To the office!—are you only going home, after all?” cried Marian.

“I’ll see when I get there,” answered Charlie; “there’s something to be done abroad. I shouldn’t wonder if they sent *me*. I say, I wish you’d all come home at once, and make things comfortable. There’s my poor father fighting it out with Susan. I should not stand it if it was me.”

“Hold your peace, Charlie, and don’t be rude,” said Mrs Atheling. “But, indeed, I wish we were at home, and out of everybody’s way.”

“Who is everybody?” said Louis. “I, who am going myself, can wish quite sincerely that we were all at home; but the addition is mysterious—who is in anybody’s way?”

“Mamma means to wish us all out of reach of the Evil Eye,” said Agnes, a little romantically.

“No such thing, my dear. I daresay we could do *him* a great deal more harm than he can do us,” said Mrs Atheling, with sudden importance and dignity; then she paused with a certain solemnity, so that everybody could perceive the grave self-restraint of the excellent mother, and that she could say a great deal more if she chose.

“But no one thinks what I am to do when you are all gone,” said Rachel; and her tearful face happily diverted her companions from investigating and from concealing the secret. There remained among them all, however, a certain degree of excitement. Charlie was returning home to-morrow—specially called home on business!—perhaps to go abroad upon the same! The fact stirred all those young hearts with something not unlike envy. This boy seemed to have suddenly leaped in one day into a man.

And it was natural enough that, hearing of this, the mind of Louis should burn and chafe with fierce impatience. Charlie, who was perfectly undemonstrative of his thoughts and imaginations, was a very boy to Louis—yet there was need and occasion for Charlie in the crowd of life, when no one thought upon this fiery and eager young man. It was late that night when Louis left this only home and haven which he had ever known; and though he would fain have left Rachel there, his little sister would not remain behind him, but clung to his arm with a strange presentiment of something about to happen, which she could not explain. Louis scarcely answered a word to the quiet talk of Rachel as they went upon their way to the Hall. With difficulty, and even with impatience, he curbed his rapid stride to her timid little footsteps, and hurried her along without a glance at the surrounding scene, memorable and striking as it was. The broad moonlight flooded over the noble park of Winterbourne. The long white-columned front of the house—which was a great Grecian house, pallid, vast, and imposing—shone in the white light like a screen of marble; and on the great lawn immediately before it were several groups of people, dwarfed into minute miraculous figures by the great space and silence, and the intense illumination, which was far more striking and particular than the broader light of day. The chances were that Louis did not see them, as he plunged on, in the blindness of preoccupation, keeping no path, through light and shadow, through the trees and underwood, and across the broad unshaded greensward, where no one could fail to perceive him. His little sister clung to his arm in an agony of fear, grief, and confidence—trembling for something about to happen with an overpowering tremor—yet holding a vague faith in her brother, strange and absorbing. She said, “Louis, Louis!” in her tone of appeal and entreaty. He did not hear her, but struck across the

broad visible park, in the full stream of the moonlight, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left. As they approached, Rachel could not even hear any conversation among the groups on the lawn; and it was impossible to suppose that they had not been seen. Louis's abrupt direct course, over the turf and through the brushwood, must have attracted the notice of bystanders even in the daylight; it was still more remarkable now, when noiseless and rapid, through the intense white radiance and the perfect stillness, the stately figure of the young man, and his timid, graceful little sister, came directly forward in face of the spectators. These spectators were all silent, looking on with a certain fascination, and Rachel could not tell whether Louis was even conscious that any one was there.

But before they could turn aside into the road which led to the Hall door—a road to which Rachel most anxiously endeavoured to guide her brother—they were suddenly arrested by the voice of Lord Winterbourne. “I must put a stop to this,” said his lordship suddenly and loudly, with so evident a reference to themselves, that even Rachel stopped without knowing it. “Here, young fellow, stop and give an account of yourself—what do you mean by wandering about my park at midnight, eh? I know your poaching practices. Setting snares, I suppose, and dragging about this girl as a protection. Get into your kennel, you mean dog; is this how you repay the shelter I have given you all your life?”

“It would be a fit return,” said Louis. He did not speak so loud, but with a tremble of scorn and bitterness and intense youthful feeling in his voice, before which the echo of his persecutor's went out and died, like an ignoble thing. “If I were, as you say,” repeated the young man, “setting snares for your game, or for your wealth, or for your life, you know it would be a fit return.”

“Yes, I live a peaceful life with this villanous young incendiary under my roof!” said Lord Winterbourne. “I’ll tell you what, you young ruffian, if nothing better can restrain you, locks and bars shall. Oh, no chance of appealing to *my* pity, with that fool of a girl upon your arm! You think you can defy me, year after year, because I have given charity to your base blood. My lad, you shall learn to know me better before another week is over our heads. Why, gentlemen, you perceive, by his own confession, I stand in danger of my life.”

“Winterbourne,” said some one over his shoulder, in a reproving tone, “*you* should be the last man in the world to taunt this unfortunate lad with his base blood.”

Lord Winterbourne turned upon his heel with a laugh of insult which sent the wild blood dancing in an agony of shame, indignation, and rage even into Rachel’s woman’s face. “Well,” said the voice of their tyrant, “I have supported the hound—what more would you have? His mother was a pretty fool, but she had her day. There’s more of her conditions in the young villain than mine. I have no idea of playing the romantic father to such a son—not I!”

Louis did not know that he threw his sister off his arm before he sprang into the midst of these half-dozen gentlemen. She did not know herself, as she stood behind clenching her small fingers together painfully, with all the burning vehemence of a woman’s passion. The young man sprang forward with the bound of a young tiger. His voice was hoarse with passion, not to be restrained. “It is a lie—a wilful, abominable lie!” cried Louis fiercely, confronting as close as a wrestler the ghastly face of his tyrant, who shrank before him. “I am no son of yours—you know I am no son of

yours! I owe you the hateful bread I have been compelled to eat—nothing more. I am without a name—I may be of base blood—but I warn you for your life, if you dare repeat this last insult. It is a lie! I tell every one who condescends to call you friend; and I appeal to God, who knows that you know it is a lie! I may be the son of any other wretch under heaven, but I am not yours. I disown it with loathing and horror. Do you hear me?—you know the truth in your heart, and so do I!”

Lord Winterbourne fell back, step by step, before the young man, who pressed upon him close and rapid, with eyes which flamed and burned with a light which he could not bear. The insulting smile upon his bloodless face had not passed from it yet. His eyes, shifting, restless, and uneasy, expressed nothing. He was not a coward, and he was sufficiently quick-witted on ordinary occasions, but he had nothing whatever to answer to this vehement and unexpected accusation. He made an unintelligible appeal with his hand to his companions, and lifted up his face to the moonlight like a spectre, but he did not answer by a single word.

“Young man,” said the gentleman who had spoken before, “I acknowledge your painful position, and that you have been addressed in a most unseemly manner—but no provocation should make you forget your natural duty. Lord Winterbourne must have had a motive for maintaining you as he has done. I put it to you calmly, dispassionately—what motive could he possibly have had, except one?”

“Ah!” said Louis, with a sudden and violent start, “he must have had a motive—it is true; he would not waste his cruel powers, even for cruelty’s sake. If any man can tell me what child it was

his interest to bastardise and defame, there may be hope and a name for me yet.”

At these words, Lord Winterbourne advanced suddenly with a singular eagerness. “Let us have done with this foolery,” he said, in a voice which was certainly less steady than usual; “I presume we can all be better employed than listening to the vapourings of this foolish boy. Go in, my lad, and learn a lesson by your folly to-night. I pass it over, simply because you have shown yourself to be a fool.”

“I, however, do not pass it over, my lord,” said Louis, who had calmed down after the most miraculous fashion, to the utter amazement of his sister. “Thank you for the provision you have given us, such as it is. Some time we may settle scores upon that subject. My sister and I must find another shelter to-night.”

The bystanders were half disposed to smile at the young man’s heroic withdrawal—but they were all somewhat amazed to find that Lord Winterbourne was as far as possible from sharing their amusement. He called out immediately in an access of passion to stop the young ruffian, incendiary, mischief-maker;—called loudly upon the servants, who began to appear at the open door—ordered Louis to his own apartment with the most unreasonable vehemence, and finally turned upon Rachel, calling her to give up the young villain’s arm, and for her life to go home.

But Rachel was wound to the fever point as well as her brother. “No, no, it is all true he has said,” cried Rachel. “I know it, like Louis; we are not your children—you dare not call us so now. I never believed you were our father—never all my life.”

## Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

