

***THOMAS LOVE
PEACOCK***



***CROTCHET
CASTLE***

Thomas Love Peacock

Crotchet Castle

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INTRODUCTION.

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THOMAS LOVE PEACOCK was born at Weymouth in 1785. His first poem, "The Genius of the Thames," was in its second edition when he became one of the friends of Shelley. That was in 1812, when Shelley's age was twenty, Peacock's twenty-seven. The acquaintance strengthened, until Peacock became the friend in whose judgment Shelley put especial trust. There were many points of agreement. Peacock, at that time, shared, in a more practical way, Shelley's desire for root and branch reform; both were poets, although not equally gifted, and both loved Plato and the Greek tragedians. In "Crotchet Castle" Peacock has expressed his own delight in Greek literature through the talk of the Reverend Dr. Folliott.

But Shelley's friendship for Peacock included a trust in him that was maintained by points of unlikeness. Peacock was shrewd and witty. He delighted in extravagance of a satire which usually said more than it meant, but always rested upon a foundation of good sense. Then also there was a touch of the poet to give grace to the utterances of a clear-headed man of the world. It was Peacock who gave its name to Shelley's poem of "Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude," published in 1816. The "Spirit of Solitude" being treated as a spirit of evil, Peacock suggested calling it "Alastor," since the Greek ἀλάστωρ means an evil genius.

Peacock's novels are unlike those of other men: they are the genuine expressions of an original and independent mind. His reading and his thinking ran together; there is free

quotation, free play of wit and satire, grace of invention too, but always unconventional. The story is always pleasant, although always secondary to the play of thought for which it gives occasion. He quarrelled with verse, whimsically but in all seriousness, in an article on "The Four Ages of Poetry," contributed in 1820 to a short-lived journal, "Ollier's Literary Miscellany." The four ages were, he said, the iron age, the Bardic; the golden, the Homeric; the silver, the Virgilian; and the brass, in which he himself lived. "A poet in our time," he said, "is a semi-barbarian in a civilised community . . . The highest inspirations of poetry are resolvable into three ingredients: the rant of unregulated passion, the whining of exaggerated feeling, and the cant of factitious sentiment; and can, therefore, serve only to ripen a splendid lunatic like Alexander, a puling driveller like Werter, or a morbid dreamer like Wordsworth." In another part of this essay he says: "While the historian and the philosopher are advancing in and accelerating the progress of knowledge, the poet is wallowing in the rubbish of departed ignorance, and raking up the ashes of dead savages to find gewgaws and rattles for the grown babies of the age. Mr. Scott digs up the poacher and cattle-stealers of the ancient Border. Lord Byron cruises for thieves and pirates on the shores of the Morea and among the Greek islands. Mr. Southey wades through ponderous volumes of travels and old chronicles, from which he carefully selects all that is false, useless, and absurd, as being essentially poetical; and when he has a commonplace book full of monstrosities, strings them into an epic." And so forth; Peacock going on to characterise, in further illustration of his argument, Wordsworth, Coleridge,

Moore, and Campbell. He did not refer to Shelley; and Shelley read his friend's whimsical attack on poetry with all good humour, proceeding to reply to it with a "Defence of Poetry," which would have appeared in the same journal, if the journal had survived. In this novel of "Crotchet Castle" there is the same good-humoured exaggeration in the treatment of "our learned friend"—Lord Brougham—to whom and to whose labours for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge there are repeated allusions. In one case Peacock associates the labours of "our learned friend" for the general instruction of the masses with encouragement of robbery (page 172), and in another with body-snatching, or, worse,—murder for dissection (page 99). "The Lord deliver me from the learned friend!" says Dr. Folliott. Brougham's elevation to a peerage in November, 1830, as Lord Brougham and Vaux, is referred to on page 177, where he is called Sir Guy do Vaux. It is not to be forgotten, in the reading, that this story was written in 1831, the year before the passing of the Reform Bill. It ends with a scene suggested by the agricultural riots of that time. In the ninth chapter, again, there is a passage dealing with Sir Walter Scott after the fashion of the criticisms in the "Four Ages of Poetry." But this critical satire gave nobody pain. Always there was a ground-work of good sense, and the broad sweep of the satire was utterly unlike the nibbling censure of the men whose wit is tainted with ill-humour. We may see also that the poet's nature cannot be expelled. In this volume we should find the touch of a poet's hand in the tale itself when dealing with the adventures of Mr. Chainmail, while he stays at the Welsh mountain inn, if the story did

not again and again break out into actual song, for it includes half-a-dozen little poems.

When Peacock wrote his attack on Poetry, he had, only two years before, produced a poem of his own—"Rhododaphne"—with a Greek fancy of the true and the false love daintily worked out. It was his chief work in verse, and gave much pleasure to a few, among them his friend Shelley. But he felt that, as the world went, he was not strong enough to help it by his singing, so he confined his writing to the novels, in which he could speak his mind in his own way, while doing his duty by his country in the East India House, where he obtained a post in 1818. From 1836 to 1856, when he retired on a pension, he was Examiner of India Correspondence. Peacock died in 1866, aged eighty-one.

H. M.

NOTE that in this tale Mac Quedy is Mac Q. E. D., son of a demonstration; Mr. Skionar, the transcendentalist, is named from Ski(as) onar, the dream of a shadow; and Mr. Philpot,—who loves rivers, is Phil(o)pot(amos).

CHAPTER I. THE VILLA.

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Captain Jamy. I wad full fain hear some question
'tween you tway.

HENRY V.

IN one of those beautiful valleys, through which the Thames (not yet polluted by the tide, the scouring of cities, or even the minor defilement of the sandy streams of Surrey) rolls a clear flood through flowery meadows, under the shade of old beech woods, and the smooth mossy greensward of the chalk hills (which pour into it their tributary rivulets, as pure and pellucid as the fountain of Bandusium, or the wells of Scamander, by which the wives and daughters of the Trojans washed their splendid garments in the days of peace, before the coming of the Greeks); in one of those beautiful valleys, on a bold round-surfaced lawn, spotted with juniper, that opened itself in the bosom of an old wood, which rose with a steep, but not precipitous ascent, from the river to the summit of the hill, stood the castellated villa of a retired citizen. Ebenezer Mac Crotchet, Esquire, was the London-born offspring of a worthy native of the "north countrie," who had walked up to London on a commercial adventure, with all his surplus capital, not very neatly tied up in a not very clean handkerchief, suspended over his shoulder from the end of a hooked stick, extracted from the first hedge on his pilgrimage; and who, after having worked himself a step or two up the ladder of

life, had won the virgin heart of the only daughter of a highly respectable merchant of Duke's Place, with whom he inherited the honest fruits of a long series of ingenuous dealings.

Mr. Mac Crotchet had derived from his mother the instinct, and from his father the rational principle, of enriching himself at the expense of the rest of mankind, by all the recognised modes of accumulation on the windy side of the law. After passing many years in the Alley, watching the turn of the market, and playing many games almost as desperate as that of the soldier of Lucullus, the fear of losing what he had so righteously gained predominated over the sacred thirst of paper-money; his caution got the better of his instinct, or rather transferred it from the department of acquisition to that of conservation. His friend, Mr. Ramsbottom, the zodiacal mythologist, told him that he had done well to withdraw from the region of Uranus or Brahma, the Maker, to that of Saturn or Veeshnu, the Preserver, before he fell under the eye of Jupiter or Seva, the Destroyer, who might have struck him down at a blow.

It is said that a Scotchman, returning home after some years' residence in England, being asked what he thought of the English, answered: "They hanna ower muckle sense, but they are an unco braw people to live amang;" which would be a very good story, if it were not rendered apocryphal by the incredible circumstance of the Scotchman going back.

Mr. Mac Crotchet's experience had given him a just title to make, in his own person, the last-quoted observation, but he would have known better than to go back, even if himself, and not his father, had been the first comer of his

line from the north. He had married an English Christian, and, having none of the Scotch accent, was ungracious enough to be ashamed of his blood. He was desirous to obliterate alike the Hebrew and Caledonian vestiges in his name, and signed himself E. M. Crotchet, which by degrees induced the majority of his neighbours to think that his name was Edward Matthew. The more effectually to sink the Mac, he christened his villa "Crotchet Castle," and determined to hand down to posterity the honours of Crotchet of Crotchet. He found it essential to his dignity to furnish himself with a coat of arms, which, after the proper ceremonies (payment being the principal), he obtained, videlicet: Crest, a crotchet rampant, in A sharp; Arms, three empty bladders, turgescient, to show how opinions are formed; three bags of gold, pendent, to show why they are maintained; three naked swords, tranchant, to show how they are administered; and three barbers' blocks, gaspant, to show how they are swallowed.

Mr. Crotchet was left a widower, with two children; and, after the death of his wife, so strong was his sense of the blessed comfort she had been to him, that he determined never to give any other woman an opportunity of obliterating the happy recollection.

He was not without a plausible pretence for styling his villa a castle, for, in its immediate vicinity, and within his own enclosed domain, were the manifest traces, on the brow of the hill, of a Roman station, or *castellum*, which was still called the "Castle" by the country people. The primitive mounds and trenches, merely overgrown with greensward, with a few patches of juniper and box on the vallum, and a

solitary ancient beech surmounting the place of the prætorium, presented nearly the same depths, heights, slopes, and forms, which the Roman soldiers had originally given them. From this cartel Mr. Crotchet christened his villa. With his rustic neighbours he was, of course, immediately and necessarily a squire: Squire Crotchet of the Castle; and he seemed to himself to settle down as naturally into an English country gentleman, as if his parentage had been as innocent of both Scotland and Jerusalem, as his education was of Rome and Athens.

But as, though you expel nature with a pitch-fork, she will yet always come back; he could not become, like a true-born English squire, part and parcel of the barley-giving earth; he could not find in game-bagging, poacher-shooting, trespasser-pounding, footpath-stopping, common-enclosing, rack-renting, and all the other liberal pursuits and pastimes which make a country gentleman an ornament to the world and a blessing to the poor: he could not find in these valuable and amiable occupations, and in a corresponding range of ideas, nearly commensurate with that of the great King Nebuchadnezzar when he was turned out to grass; he could not find in this great variety of useful action, and vast field of comprehensive thought, modes of filling up his time that accorded with his Caledonian instinct. The inborn love of disputation, which the excitements and engagements of a life of business had smothered, burst forth through the calmer surface of a rural life. He grew as fain as Captain Jamy, "to hear some argument betwixt ony tway," and being very hospitable in his establishment, and liberal in his invitations, a numerous detachment from the advanced

guard of the “march of intellect,” often marched down to Crotchet Castle.

When the fashionable season filled London with exhibitors of all descriptions, lecturers and else, Mr. Crotchet was in his glory; for, in addition to the perennial literati of the metropolis, he had the advantage of the visits of a number of hardy annuals, chiefly from the north, who, as the interval of their metropolitan flowering allowed, occasionally accompanied their London brethren in excursions to Crotchet Castle.

Amongst other things, he took very naturally to political economy, read all the books on the subject which were put forth by his own countrymen, attended all lectures thereon, and boxed the technology of the sublime science as expertly as an able seaman boxes the compass.

With this agreeable mania he had the satisfaction of biting his son, the hope of his name and race, who had borne off from Oxford the highest academical honours; and who, treading in his father’s footsteps to honour and fortune, had, by means of a portion of the old gentleman’s surplus capital, made himself a junior partner in the eminent loan-jobbing firm of Catchflat and Company. Here, in the days of paper prosperity, he applied his science-illuminated genius to the blowing of bubbles, the bursting of which sent many a poor devil to the gaol, the workhouse, or the bottom of the river, but left young Crotchet rolling in riches.

These riches he had been on the point of doubling, by a marriage with the daughter of Mr. Touchandgo, the great banker, when, one foggy morning, Mr. Touchandgo and the contents of his till were suddenly reported absent; and as

the fortune which the young gentleman had intended to marry was not forthcoming, this tender affair of the heart was nipped in the bud.

Miss Touchandgo did not meet the shock of separation quite so complacently as the young gentleman: for he lost only the lady, whereas she lost a fortune as well as a lover. Some jewels, which had glittered on her beautiful person as brilliantly as the bubble of her father's wealth had done in the eyes of his gudgeons, furnished her with a small portion of paper-currency; and this, added to the contents of a fairy purse of gold, which she found in her shoe on the eventful morning when Mr. Touchandgo melted into thin air, enabled her to retreat into North Wales, where she took up her lodging in a farm-house in Merionethshire, and boarded very comfortably for a trifling payment, and the additional consideration of teaching English, French, and music, to the little Ap-Llymrys. In the course of this occupation she acquired sufficient knowledge of Welsh to converse with the country people.

She climbed the mountains, and descended the dingles, with a foot which daily habit made by degrees almost as steady as a native's. She became the nymph of the scene; and if she sometimes pined in thought for her faithless Strephon, her melancholy was anything but green and yellow: it was as genuine white and red as occupation, mountain air, thyme-fed mutton, thick cream, and fat bacon could make it: to say nothing of an occasional glass of double X, which Ap-Llymry, who yielded to no man west of the Wrekin in brewage, never failed to press upon her at dinner and supper. He was also earnest, and sometimes

successful, in the recommendation of his mead, and most pertinacious on winter nights in enforcing a trial of the virtues of his elder wine. The young lady's personal appearance, consequently, formed a very advantageous contrast to that of her quondam lover, whose physiognomy the intense anxieties of his bubble-blowing days, notwithstanding their triumphant result, had left blighted, sallowed, and crow's-footed, to a degree not far below that of the fallen spirit who, in the expressive language of German romance, is described as "scathed by the ineradicable traces of the thunderbolts of Heaven;" so that, contemplating their relative geological positions, the poor deserted damsel was flourishing on slate, while her rich and false young knight was pining on chalk.

Squire Crotchet had also one daughter, whom he had christened Lemma, and who, as likely to be endowed with a very ample fortune was, of course, an object very tempting to many young soldiers of fortune, who were marching with the march of mind, in a good condition for taking castles, as far as not having a goat is a qualification for such exploits. She was also a glittering bait to divers young squires expectant (whose fathers were too well acquainted with the occult signification of mortgage), and even to one or two sprigs of nobility, who thought that the lining of a civic purse would superinduce a very passable factitious nap upon a thread-bare title. The young lady had received an expensive and complicated education, complete in all the elements of superficial display. She was thus eminently qualified to be the companion of any masculine luminary who had kept due pace with the "astounding progress" of intelligence. It must

be confessed, that a man who has not kept due pace with it, is not very easily found: this march being one of that "astounding" character in which it seems impossible that the rear can be behind the van. The young lady was also tolerably good looking: north of Tweed, or in Palestine, she would probable have been a beauty; but for the valleys of the Thames she was perhaps a little too much to the taste of Solomon, and had a nose which rather too prominently suggested the idea of the tower of Lebanon, which looked towards Damascus.

In a village in the vicinity of the Castle was the vicarage of the Reverend Doctor Folliott, a gentleman endowed with a tolerable stock of learning, an interminable swallow, and an indefatigable pair of lungs. His pre-eminence in the latter faculty gave occasion to some etymologists to ring changes on his name, and to decide that it was derived from Follis Optimus, softened through an Italian medium into Folle Ottimo, contracted poetically into Folleotto, and elided Anglicé into Folliott, signifying a first-rate pair of bellows. He claimed to be descended lineally from the illustrious Gilbert Folliott, the eminent theologian, who was a Bishop of London in the twelfth century, whose studies were interrupted in the dead of night by the Devil, when a couple of epigrams passed between them, and the Devil, of course, proved the smaller wit of the two.

This reverend gentleman, being both learned and jolly, became by degrees an indispensable ornament to the new squire's table. Mr. Crotchet himself was eminently jolly, though by no means eminently learned. In the latter respect he took after the great majority of the sons of his father's