

VARIOUS

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**AMPTHILL HOUSE, THE
SEAT OF LORD HOLLAND**



This is a delightful retreat for the statesman and man of letters—distinctions which its illustrious occupant enjoys with high honour to his country and himself.

Amphill is throughout a never-tiring region of romantic beauties. These were sung in some lines of great sweetness and poetical feeling, a few years since by Mr. Luttrell, who appears to have taken his muse by the arm, and "wandered up and down," describing the natural glories and olden celebrity of Amphill. We remember to have read his "Lines" with unmixed pleasure.

The Engraving is copied from one of a Series of "Select Illustrations of Bedfordshire;" the letter-press accompaniments

being neatly written by the Rev. I. D. Parry, M. A. author of the "History of Woburn." Ampthill follows.

Ampthill House, now the seat of the Right Hon. Lord Holland, is a plain but very neat edifice, built of good stone. It was erected by the first Lord Ashburnham, then the possessor of the estate, in 1694. It is situated rather below the summit of a hill, which rises at some little distance behind, and much less elevated than the site of the old castle, but has still a commanding situation in front, and is sufficiently elevated to possess a great share of the fine view over the vale of Bedford. It is also well sheltered by trees, though the passing traveller would have no idea of the magnificent lime alley, which is concealed behind it. The house has a long front, abundantly furnished with windows, and has two deep and projecting wings. In the centre is a plain angular pediment, bearing the late Lord Ossory's arms, and over the door is a small circular one, pierced for an antique bust, and supported by two three-quarter Ionic pillars. In this house is a small collection of paintings, &c., principally portraits.

At the foot of the staircase is a large painting, formerly *in fresco* at Houghton House, which was taken off the wall, and put on canvass by an ingenious process of the late Mr. Salmon. It represents a gamekeeper, or woodman, taking aim with a cross-bow, full front, with some curious perspective scenery, 6 feet by 9-1/2 feet. We have heard a tradition, that it is some person of high rank in disguise; some say James I., who was once on a visit at Houghton. From the propensities of "gentle King Jamie," this

is not unlikely.

The pleasure ground at the back of the house, commands a pleasing, extensive view; beyond this is the lime walk, which is certainly one of the finest in England.—It is upwards of a quarter of a mile in length, the trees in some parts, finely arching; and may be pronounced, upon the whole, superior to any walk in Oxford or Cambridge.

The park in which this house stands, is well known, from many descriptions, to be a singularly picturesque and pleasing one. It is, at the same time, a small one, but the dimensions are concealed by the numerous and beautiful groups of trees with which it is studded. The oaks are particularly celebrated for their great size and age, several of them are supposed to be upwards of 500 years old, and some do not hesitate to say 1,000 years; the girth of many of them is ten yards, or considerably more. A survey of this park, by order of the Conventional Parliament, in 1653, pronounced 287 of these oaks as being hollow, and too much decayed for the use of the navy. The whole of these remain to this day, and may, perhaps, continue two or three centuries longer; some few of them have been scathed by lightning.

Behind the house, near the entrance of the park from the turnpike-road, are some ponds, similar in appearance to those frequently seen adjoining ancient mansions; above these, at the edge of a precipice, was the front of the ancient castle. This building is doubtless that erected by Lord Fanhope, at the beginning of the fifteenth century. It was used as a royal resort by

Henry VIII., who was often here, and by Queen Catherine, who resided here some time previous, and during the time her divorce was in process at Dunstable. There are, in the possession of Lord Holland, two ground plans of this castle, which, by the late Lord Ossory, were supposed to have been taken about the year 1616, at which time it was supposed the castle was demolished. From these, the following particulars of this building are collected:—The area was a square of about 220 feet; in front was a large court, 115 feet by 120; behind this were two very small ones, each 45 feet square; and between these was an oblong courtyard. Between the front and back courts, the building had two small lateral projections, like the transepts of a church. In front were two square projecting towers; and round the building, at irregular distances, were nine others, projecting, of different shapes, but principally five-sided segments of octagons—if this description be intelligible. It was, probably, from the general appearance of the plan, intended more as a residence for a nobleman or prince, than a fortress, although the situation was favourable for defence. The view in front is extremely beautiful for this part of the country.

Lord Ossory planted a grove of firs at the back of this spot, and erected, in 1773, in the centre, a monument, consisting of an octagonal shaft raised on four steps, surmounted by a cross, bearing a shield with Queen Catherine's arms, of Castile and Arragon. This was designed by Mr. Essex, the improver of King's College, Chapel, and is very neat, but of small dimensions.

On a tablet inserted in the base of the cross, is the following inscription, from the pen of Horace Walpole, Earl of Orford, which when read on the spot, excites some degree of interest:—

In days of yore, here Ampthill's towers were seen,
The mournful refuge of an injured queen;
Here flowed her pure, but unavailing tears,
Here blinded zeal sustained her sinking years.
Yet Freedom hence her radiant banner wav'd,
And Love avenged a realm by priests enslav'd;
From Catherine's wrongs a nation's bliss was spread,
And Luther's light from lawless Henry's bed.

The possessors of Ampthill are thus traced by Mr. Parry:—

The survey of Ampthill Park, made by order of Parliament, 1649, speaks of the castle as being long ago totally demolished.¹ There was, however, what was called the Great Lodge, or Capital Mansion. King James I. gave the Honour of Ampthill to the Earl of Kelly. It soon reverted to the Crown. In 1612, Thomas, Lord Fenton, and Elizabeth his wife, resigned the office of High Steward of the Honour of Ampthill to the King. The following year the custody of the Great Park was granted to Lord Bruce, whose family became lessees of the Honour, which they kept till 1738. In the 17th century, the Nicholls's became lessees of the

¹ In Peck's "Desiderata Curiosa," is a list of salaries paid in Queen Elizabeth's time to the Keepers, &c. of all the Royal Palaces and Castles. At Ampthill they were as follow: Keeper of the Manor House, 2*l.* 13*s.* 4*d.*, Great Park, 4*l.*, with herbage and pannage, 15*l.*; *Paler* of the Park, 4*l.* 11*s.* 4*d.*, herbage and pannage, 15*l.*

Great Park under the Bruces, who reserved the office of Master of the Game. The Nicholls's resided at the Capital Mansion. After the Restoration, Amptill Great Park was granted by Charles II. to Mr. John Ashburnham, as some reward for his distinguished services to his father and himself (*vide* Hist. Eng.) The first Lord Ashburnham built the present house, in 1694. In 1720 it was purchased of this family by Viscount Fitzwilliam, who sold it in 1736 to Lady Gowran, grandmother of the late Lord Ossory, who in 1800, became possessed of the lease of the Honour, by exchange with the Duke of Bedford. His family name, an ancient one in Ireland, was Fitzpatrick; he was Earl of Upper Ossory in Ireland, and Baron of the same in England. He died in 1818, and was succeeded by Lord Holland, the present possessor, who has also a fine old mansion at Kensington.²

The present Lord Holland, Henry Richard Vassal Fox, Baron Holland of Holland Co. Lincoln, and Foxley, Co. Wilts, Recorder of Nottingham, F. R. S. A.; was born November 23, 1773, succeeded to the title in 1774; married, 1797, Elizabeth, a daughter of Richard Vassal, Esq.

² For an Engraving of which see *the Mirror*, vol. xiii. p. 385.

CHARACTER OF A GOOD ALBUM

(For the Mirror.)

——"Here's a gem of beauty!
It sparkles with a pure and virgin lustre,
And many prize it much."

Old Poet.

There is something very interesting associated with a well-arranged and elegant album, embodying passages of delicate taste and superior talent, and containing the diversified, playful, pointed, eloquent, and original papers, of a number of intellectual and distinguished contributors.

I had, a short time ago, one of these beautiful albums placed in my hand, which was characterized by marked and pre-eminent excellencies. In addition to its being bound in the most splendid manner, and containing the most tasteful embellishments, on paper exquisitely embossed, it was adorned with appropriate contributions, from the vigorous mind of Mrs. Hannah Moore—from the pure and classic taste of the eloquent Robert Hall—from the fervid and poetic imagination of James Montgomery—and many an elegant and beauteous production,

communicated by our superior and ingenious writers. It was deeply interesting to mark the specimens of penmanship which the various contributors furnished: the bold hand of one—the neat style of another—the careless and dashing strokes of another—and the stiff, awkward, and almost illegible writing of another. I was much struck, also, with the variety of mind which the album exhibited: on one page, there was the comic strain of Hood; on another, the pure and exquisite taste of Campbell; on another, the fire and vividness of Scott; on another, the minute and graphic painting of Crabbe; and on another, the bold, condensed, and impassioned style, in which Byron so peculiarly excelled.

Now, if all albums could be of this character, their value would be intrinsic and superior, and they would be permanently interesting, because to them we could frequently recur with refreshing and peculiar enjoyment. I regret, however, to say, that the majority of albums are comparatively valueless: they are written with so much negligence; many of the pieces are of so light and frivolous a character; there is so much childish and mawkish sentimentality in numbers of the effusions poured forth; and there is so great a destitution of solid, original, and striking thought, that, in my unpretending, yet honest estimation, the majority of albums are worth comparatively nothing. A good album should contain pieces of genuine talent; should be marked by no frivolity or childishness; should be concise, pointed, and powerful in its contributions; and should embody

valuable moral principle; and, to secure these excellencies, the possessor of an elegant album should not place it in the hand of any, accompanied with the request that a contribution be inserted, without ascertaining, in the first instance, that the person solicited is of genuine taste and talent, and real principle, because, if these qualifications be not developed, an album will be merely filled with trifling, crude, unconnected, and worthless pieces—marked by no beauty, exhibiting no taste, characterized by no originality, and inculcating no valuable sentiment.

T. W.

POPULAR SUPERSTITIONS

(For the Mirror.)

No man will be found in whose mind airy notions do not sometimes tyrannize and force him to hope or fear beyond the limits of sober probability.—Johnson.

The superstitions of nations must always be interesting, since they afford a criterion of the progress that knowledge and reason have made. To trace the origin of the belief that departed spirits revisit the earth, a belief apparently so repugnant to reason and revelation, must ever attract the attention of the curious. For it is a question of importance to religion, even although the existence of apparitions would not in the slightest degree invalidate those sacred writings on which the bases of religion are founded; on the contrary, if the reality of apparitions (that is of the existence of apparitions) could be ascertained, another proof would be added to an immense weight of testimony of the ability possessed by the Deity to arrest or alter what appears the ordinary course of nature.

The existence of apparitions has been acknowledged by many, and a tendency towards a belief of them is to be remarked in many more. Ardent, and what is stranger still, since directly

opposed to ardent, morbid minds are too ready to embrace "the pleasing dreadful thought," and to this may be attributed the prevalence of this kind of superstition among the poets, and all indeed of an enthusiastic temperament.³ Some of the tales urged in defence of apparitions are upon a *primâ facié* observation to be traced to an exuberance⁴ of imagination on the part of the ghost, others that are plainly false, and others that as they cannot be authenticated, are not worthy of notice. I shall here give what I consider an example of the former.

During the celebrated Peninsular campaign, as a lady, whose son, a French officer in Spain, was seated in her room, she was astonished to perceive the folding doors at the bottom of the apartment slowly open, and disclose to her eyes, *her son*. He begged her not to be alarmed, and informed her that he had been just killed by a grape-shot, and even showed her the wound in his side; the doors closed again and she saw no more. In a few days she received a letter, which informed her that her son had

³ Dr. Johnson, it is well known, was a firm believer in ghosts, as the following extract will show:—"That the dead are seen no more," said Imlac, "I will undertake to maintain, against the concurrent and unvaried testimony of all ages, and of all nations. * * * This opinion which, perhaps, prevails as far as human nature is diffused, could become universal only by its truth(!): those that never heard of one another would not have agreed in a tale which nothing but experience could make credible."—*Rasselas*, chap. xxx.

⁴ When the grammarians could not interpret some word in a sentence, which they could make without it, they used to attribute the unfortunate word to a natural redundancy in the language, and in the same manner all ghost stories could be solved by referring it to "an exuberance," &c. &c.

fallen, after distinguishing himself in a most gallant manner, and mentioning the time of his death, which happened at precisely the same moment the apparition was seen by her! And when I add that the lady was not *at all addicted to superstition*, the strangeness of the occurrence is considerably increased. What inference is to be drawn from this extraordinary tale? I confess I cannot, and do not, believe that apparitions revisit the earth even at the "glimpses o' the moon," nor does this story at all change my opinion, and for one grand reason, which is this—That it is highly improbable that the course of nature would be interrupted for the production of so insignificant an effect, for it appears an unnecessary exertion of divine power, when the good attained would be little or none.

Let us, therefore, attribute it to a powerful imagination acting on a mind already affected with anxiety, and I believe we shall have no occasion for yielding to the idea of an apparition to explain the circumstance. I am acquainted with another tale of the same kind, but I am debarred from relating it, from my not being authorized to do so by the person, a gentleman of large property in Scotland, to whom it occurred. Lord Byron was much addicted to that species of superstition of which I am treating: the gloomy idea of spirits revisiting the earth to gaze on those who they loved, was congenial to his mind, and an overheated fancy indulged beyond its due limits, converted the morbid visionary into the superstitious ascetic.

There is an account of a ghost related in the Notes to Moore's Life of the Noble Poet (vol. i.) I have mentioned, which I shall

detail here, as it may have escaped the memory of some of your readers. A captain of a merchant vessel was on a voyage to some port; having retired to rest, he was disturbed in the night by a horrid dream, that his brother, an officer in the navy was drowned. He awoke and perceived something dark lying at the foot of the hammock, and on putting out his hand discovered it was a naval uniform, wet. Some days after this his dream was confirmed by a letter informing him of his brother's death by drowning.

At Oakhampton, in Devonshire, there are the remains of a beautiful castle dismantled by Henry VIII. on the attainder of Henry Courtenay, which is situated in a park, concerning which many traditions exist, one of which I will give here as it was told by a native. A great many years ago, there lived a lady at Oakhampton Castle, who was famous for her love of cruelty and for unbounded ostentation. This lady was killed, and her ghost haunted some house in Oakhampton much to the discomfiture of all the inhabitants thereof. A conclave of "most grave and reverend signiors" was convoked, who ordained that the disturbed spirit should every night pluck a blade of grass till all should be gathered. And now, every night at the chilly hour of midnight, the lady in a splendid coach with four skeleton horses, a skeleton coachman, and skeleton footmen, is to be seen in the park obeying the dictum of the Oakhampton worthies. This legend will be found, I am told, in "Fitz, of Fitzford," by Mrs. Bray. I shall not comment on this, as it evidently appears a

wild legend, on which we can found nothing.

There is another tale which I shall recount here, since I can vouch for its authenticity.

During the Irish Rebellion of 1798, a gentleman went to take possession of a house in a lone district of Ireland. The house had been uninhabited for some time, and was out of repair. Between nine and twelve at night, when the gentleman had retired to rest, he was alarmed by hearing a noise; he listened, the noise increased till the house rung with the repeated shocks; he hastily sprung out of bed, and imagining it was the Rebels, he rushed into the room where his servant slept; "Patrick, get up, the Rebels are breaking in," said he, "Don't you hear the noise?" "Lord bless yer honor's worship and glory, it's only the Daunder." "Daunder, sir, you rebel, the Daunder, what do you mean?" The servant explained that the knocking was regularly heard every night at the same time, and such was the case. Various parts of the wall were pulled down, and the house almost rebuilt, but to no purpose.

Foley Place.

An Antiquary.

POEMS BY A KING OF PERSIA

(To the Editor.)

It is rather an unusual thing in the present age to hear of monarchs being authors, and much more so of being poets. It is true, there have been instances of this kind in former times; but perhaps none deserved more notice than Fath Ali Shah, the King of Persia. The author of a collection of elegies and sonnets, Mr. Scott Waring, in his "Tour to Sheeraz," has exhibited a specimen of the king's amatory productions. He also states that the government of Kashan, one of the chief cities in Persia, was the reward of the king to the person who excelled in poetical composition.

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