

Thomas Love Peacock (1785-1866)

5 *The Priest and the Mulberry Tree*

Did you hear of the curate who mounted his mare,
And merrily trotted along to the fair?
Of creature more tractable none ever heard,
In the height of her speed she would stop at a word;
And again with a word, when the curate said Hey, 5
She put forth her mettle, and galloped away.

As near to the gates of the city he rode,
While the sun of September all brilliantly glowed,
The good priest discovered, with eyes of desire,
A mulberry tree in a hedge of wild briar; 10
On boughs long and lofty, in many a green shoot,
Hung large, black, and glossy, the beautiful fruit.

The curate was hungry and thirsty to boot;
He shrunk from the thorns, though he longed for the fruit;
With a word he arrested his courser's keen speed, 15
And he stood up erect on the back of his steed;
On the saddle he stood, while the creature stood still,
And he gathered the fruit, till he took his good fill.

'Sure never', he thought, 'was a creature so rare,
So docile, so true, as my excellent mare. 20
Lo, here, how I stand' (and he gazed all around),
'As safe and as steady as if on the ground,
Yet how had it been, if some traveller this way,
Had, dreaming no mischief, but chanced to cry Hey?'

He stood with his head in the mulberry tree, 25
And he spoke out aloud in his fond reverie:
At the sound of the word, the good mare made a push,
And down went the priest in the wild-briar bush.

He remembered too late, on his thorny green bed,
Much that well may be thought, cannot wisely be said. 30

1831

(From *The Poems of Thomas Love Peacock*. Ed. Brimley Johnson.
London: George Routledge & Sons, 1907)