

**THE NOVELS, TALES,
VAUDEVILLES, LIFE
AND REMINISCENCES OF
CHARLES PAUL DE ROCK**

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CHARLES PAUL DE ROCK**

The Novels Tales Vaudevilles
Life and Reminiscences

OF

Charles
Paul de Kock

Translated into English by

MARY HANFORD FORD



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The Author



CHARLES PAUL DE KOCK, better known as "Paul de Kock," was born at Passy, near Paris, the 21st of May, 1794. His father, a wealthy Dutch banker, domiciled in France, was a close friend of General Dumouriez, and during the latter's campaigns served with him in the army of the north.

A few months previous to Paul de Kock's birth, his father, the soldier-banker, repaired to Paris to receive there a large sum of money due him for his services; but the Convention was in the habit of using the executioner's axe in the acquittal of its obligations. Its creditor, M. de Kock, was guillotined, and his wife, the author's mother, was cast into prison. Fortunately, however, she eventually managed to escape the fate intended for her by the Terrorists. Madame de Kock, in spite of her horrible experiences, continued her residence in Paris.

Paul de Kock, had one brother, a few years his senior, who remained with his father's relatives in Holland, had a brilliant career of arms in the far East, was created a baron on his return to the Netherlands, and, for a score of years following, served with notable credit as Minister of the Interior in the Cabinet. The resemblance between these brothers, the Frenchman and the Hollander, was quite singular. They had the same height, the same physiognomy, the same voice, look, and even smile. Indeed, the novelist could with safety have journeyed to the Hague and have been taken by his Majesty to be the Cabinet Minister.

In his youth, however, the child was not father to the man, and Paul de Kock gave little evidence then

✦ Charles Paul de Kock ✦

of the bold romancer he ultimately became; shy, observant, saying little, his chief concern was with books.

Madame de Kock being passionately devoted to her son, was, in consequence thereof, unable to endure the idea of their ever being separated. A day away from Paul was impossible, so the young man was not sent to college. His education was had from tutors at home. The first one of his preceptors, rather than make his pupil give heed to the classics, supplemented the instruction by a course in novel-reading, having in mind, evidently, that he himself would then have leisure sufficient for a similar pursuit. At this time, the family occupied a small house at Passy, quite near Chateau d'Eau. Many were the hours spent by master and pupil in wandering through the thickly-wooded suburbs of the city, where, with books in hand, and sitting under the young oaks' shadows, food for mind and body was eagerly devoured. Up to the age of ten, his education was had almost entirely in this open-air school, and his fondness in after years for the forest life at Romainville may be accounted for by these early trips to nature.



FINALLY, there came to him a disposition for serious thought and study. He read while eating, read rather than sleep, and wherever the day took him, whether to the woods, or in his mother's company to some drawing-room, he carried with him the never-forgotten book.

"Your son is indeed studious," remarked an old friend to Madame de Kock, and then to Paul who was at the moment absorbed in reading, "and you, my little man, what have you there? Roman history, I have no doubt."

"No," replied the boy, "it's 'Alexis or the Little House in the Wood.'" The old friend was at once scandalized.

"A novel! and madame do you permit such a thing?"



Early Life



"His teacher does," answered the mother.

"Indeed! well, that teacher should be discharged."

At this juncture Paul interrupted by saying to his critic, "I should like to know why? I read novels, sir, because I wish to do it so as to learn my trade. Anyway, why do you interfere?"

The response is unknown; it was no doubt lively.

Madame de Kock, although evincing no surprise or resentment at her son's choice of a vocation, reprimanded the boy for his impertinence, and, later on, having discharged the tutor in question, engaged in his stead another, who, alas for Paul, did not believe in the romantic system of instruction practiced by tutor number one. This change terminated the delightful rambles, and the young scholar was compelled to resume his studies.



TWO years later a clerkship in a banking house was secured him. The offices occupied by the firm were in a building on the Rue Taitbout, which building became subsequently the home of the celebrated Café de Paris. Knowing that his mother had a small income only, and being anxious to submit implicitly to her plans for his future, Paul took actual pleasure in the doing of the irksome duties of this clerical position. This desire to please was however, of short duration.

In those days a bank clerk had usually the separate use of a portfolio or flat leather case in which were carried accounts, correspondence, and the like. Strange to say there rested in Paul's portfolio for sometime and unknown to all but himself, a manuscript whose contents the youth thought much less dry than the facts and figures of finance. Bending over his desk Paul wrote a chapter between two calculations; one moment footing figures and the next formulating a spirited dialogue. He wilfully neglected the correctness of a total, so that he might better determine the virtues to be given his hero or

† Charles Paul de Kock †

heroine. To be sure the figuring might prove false, but what then? The chapter was finished.

As day followed day the manuscript swelled in size. To keep the precious document at home was impossible, for discovery there meant its consignment to the flames.

"Dear me," said his employer one morning, tapping the bulging sides of the portfolio, "there must have been a large mail from the country."

"Not more than usual, sir," replied Paul, a trifle disconcerted.

"What, the devil! this portfolio is full. Let us see."

There was no escape. The precious manuscript was tugged slowly forth from its hiding-place.

"I may be deceived, but you are writing a novel."

"Pardon, sir," gasped the young man, "but take care there, please, you will tear the pages!"

"Indeed! and if I did it would be the best thing that ever happened to you," cried the banker, his surprise turning to anger. "And you do not even blush at the idea of wasting your time on such stuff. Time that is mine! 'The Child of My Wife' and you dare concoct in my office a novel and with such a title! 'The Child of My Wife,' indeed; it is a flagrant immorality!"

"I beg of you, sir," said Paul, "please dispense with all commentary. If you do not care to have your clerks write novels, I will leave the office at once."

"Ah! you take the very words out of my mouth. You are no longer wanted here."

"And I am overjoyed therefore!" said Paul, bowing low.



E then hastened home to announce to Madame de Kock that henceforth his time was to be given to literature. "There!" he exclaimed, "is my first novel; it will not be my last. If you weep you will deprive me of courage. We must

† His Publishers †

laugh, so listen to one chapter." A few minutes later, the mother laughed, then cried, then laughed again; her son had made known his comic originality, revealed his irrepressible humor.



WHEN Paul sought a publisher, but not one deigned to even examine the beloved manuscript. Finally, a thousand francs were withdrawn from the savings of Madame de Kock, given to her son, who, fearing a second judgment in the matter, at once hurried off in quest of a printer. He found one and the book went to press. But more trouble arose. The difficulty was as to how and to whom the edition could be sold. The printer, not having paid the expenses, could, of course, give no farther thought to a solution of the problem. In vain were copies left at the book stores; "The Child of My Wife" went begging for buyers.

Luckily, the unexpected happening, fortune seemed to smile upon Paul de Kock. Weary of importuning the publishers, and tired of being waved aside, there occurred to him the idea of writing a play. He thereupon wrote a melodrama which was produced at the Ambigu-Comique.

The critics and public having proclaimed the play a decided success, along came the publishers.

"Did you not offer me something a short time ago?" inquired Barba, the publisher.

"Yes, 'Georgette.'"

"Have you got it yet?"

"There it is, among my papers."

"Well, you see," said the publisher, "I occupy myself altogether with theatrical matter, but I can doubtless find some one who will bring out your book. What will you take for it?"

"What you care to offer," joyfully replied Paul.

"Well, then," concluded Barba, "you will surely deal with my man. To-morrow, I'll send him to you."

The next day, Hubert, the publisher Barba had in