

# The Betrothed

Sir Walter Scott

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## THE BETROTHED

### INTRODUCTION--(1832.)

The Tales of the Crusaders was determined upon as the title of the following series of the Novels, rather by the advice of the few friends whom, death has now rendered still fewer, than by the author's own taste. Not but that he saw plainly enough the interest which might be excited by the very name of the Crusaders, but he was conscious at the same time that that interest was of a character which it might be more easy to create than to satisfy, and that by the mention of so magnificent a subject each reader might be induced to call up to his imagination a sketch so extensive and so grand that it might not be in the power of the author to fill it up, who would thus stand in the predicament of the dwarf bringing with him a standard to measure his own stature, and showing himself, therefore, says Sterne, "a dwarf more ways than one."

It is a fact, if it were worth while to examine it, that the publisher and author, however much their general interests are the same, may be said to differ so far as title pages are concerned; and it is a secret of the tale-telling art, if it could be termed a secret worth knowing, that a taking-title, as it is called, best answers the purpose of the bookseller, since it often goes far to cover his risk, and sells an edition not unfrequently before the public have well seen it. But the author ought to seek more permanent fame, and wish that his work, when its leaves are first cut open, should be at least fairly judged of. Thus many of the best novelists have been anxious to give their works such titles as render it out of the reader's power to conjecture their contents, until they should have an opportunity of reading them.

All this did not prevent the Tales of the Crusaders from being the title fixed on; and the celebrated year of projects (eighteen hundred and twenty-five) being the time of publication, an introduction was prefixed according to the humour of the day.

The first tale of the series was influenced in its structure, rather by the wish to avoid the general expectations which might be formed from the title, than to comply with any one of them, and so disappoint the rest. The story was, therefore, less an incident belonging to the Crusades, than one which was occasioned by the singular cast of mind introduced and spread wide by those memorable undertakings. The confusion among families was not the least concomitant evil of the extraordinary preponderance of this superstition. It was no unusual thing for a Crusader, returning from his long toils of war and pilgrimage, to find his family augmented by some young off-shoot, of whom the deserted matron could give no very accurate account, or perhaps to find his marriage-bed filled, and that, instead of becoming nurse to an old man, his household dame had preferred being the lady-love of a

young one. Numerous are the stories of this kind told in different parts of Europe; and the returned knight or baron, according to his temper, sat down good naturedly contented with the account which his lady gave of a doubtful matter, or called in blood and fire to vindicate his honour, which, after all, had been endangered chiefly by his forsaking his household gods to seek adventures in Palestine.

Scottish tradition, quoted, I think, in some part of the Border Minstrelsy, ascribes to the clan of Tweedie, a family once stout and warlike, a descent which would not have misbecome a hero of antiquity. A baron, somewhat elderly we may suppose, had wedded a buxom young lady, and some months after their union he left her to ply the distaff alone in his old tower, among the mountains of the county of Peebles, near the sources of the Tweed. He returned after seven or eight years, no uncommon space for a pilgrimage to Palestine, and found his family had not been lonely in his absence, the lady having; been cheered by the arrival of a stranger, (of whose approach she could give the best account of any one,) who hung on her skirts, and called her mammy, and was just such as the baron would have longed to call his son, but that he could by no means make his age correspond, according to the doctrine of civilians, with his own departure for Palestine. He applied to his wife, therefore, for the solution of this dilemma. The lady, after many floods of tears, which she had reserved for the occasion, informed the honest gentleman, that, walking one day alone by the banks of the infant river, a human form arose from a deep eddy, still known and termed Tweed-pool, who deigned to inform her that he was the tutelar genius of the stream, and, *\_bongre malgre\_*, became the father of the sturdy fellow, whose appearance had so much surprised her husband. This story, however suitable to Pagan times, would have met with full credence from few of the baron's contemporaries, but the wife was young and beautiful, the husband old and in his dotage; her family (the Frazers, it is believed) were powerful and warlike, and the baron had had fighting enough in the holy wars. The event was, that he believed, or seemed to believe, the tale, and remained contented with the child with whom his wife and the Tweed had generously presented him. The only circumstance which preserved the memory of the incident was, that the youth retained the name of Tweed, or Tweedie. The baron, meanwhile, could not, as the old Scotch song says, "Keep the cradle rowing," and the Tweed apparently thought one natural son was family enough for a decent Presbyterian lover; and so little gall had the baron in his composition, that having bred up the young Tweed as his heir while he lived, he left him in that capacity when he died, and the son of the river-god founded the family of Drummelzier and others, from whom have flowed, in the phrase of the Ettrick Shepherd, "many a brave fellow, and many a bauld feat."

The tale of the Noble Moringer is somewhat of the same nature--it exists in a collection of German popular songs, entitled, *Sammlung Deutschen Volkslieder*, Berlin, 1807; published by Messrs. Busching and Von der Hagen. The song is supposed to be extracted from a manuscript chronicle of Nicholas Thomann, chaplain to St. Leonard in Wissenhorn, and dated 1533. The ballad, which is popular in Germany, is supposed from the language, to have been composed in the fifteenth century. The Noble Moringer, a powerful baron of Germany, about to set out on a pilgrimage to the land of St.

Thomas, with the geography of which we are not made acquainted, resolves to commit his castle, dominions, and lady, to the vassal who should pledge him to keep watch over them till the seven years of his pilgrimage were accomplished. His chamberlain, an elderly and a cautious man, declines the trust, observing, that seven days, instead of seven years, would be the utmost space to which he would consent to pledge himself for the fidelity of any woman. The esquire of the Noble Moringer confidently accepts the trust refused by the chamberlain, and the baron departs on his pilgrimage. The seven years are now elapsed, all save a single day and night, when, behold, a vision descends on the noble pilgrim as he sleeps in the land of the stranger.

"It was the noble Moringer, within an orchard slept,  
When on the Baron's slumbering sense a boding vision crept,  
And whispered in his ear a voice,  
'Tis time. Sir Knight, to wake--  
Thy lady and thy heritage another master take.

"Thy tower another banner knows, thy steeds another rein,  
And stoop them to another's will, thy gallant vassal train;  
And she, the lady of thy love, so faithful once and fair,  
This night, within thy father's hall, she weds Marstetten's heir."

The Moringer starts up and prays to his patron St. Thomas, to rescue him from the impending shame, which his devotion to his patron had placed him in danger of incurring. St. Thomas, who must have felt the justice of the imputation, performs a miracle. The Moringer's senses were drenched in oblivion, and when he waked he lay in a well-known spot of his own domain; on his right the Castle of his fathers, and on his left the mill, which, as usual, was built not far distant from the Castle.

"He leaned upon his pilgrim's staff, and to the mill he drew--  
So altered was his goodly form that none their master knew.  
The baron to the miller said, 'Good friend, for charity,  
Tell a poor pilgrim, in your land, what tidings may there be?'

"The miller answered him again--'He knew of little news,  
Save that the lady of the land did a new bridegroom choose;  
Her husband died in distant land, such is the constant word,  
His death sits heavy on our souls, he was a worthy lord.

"Of him I held the little mill, which wins me living free--  
God rest the baron in his grave, he aye was kind to me!  
And when St. Martin's tide comes round, and millers take their toll,  
The priest that prays for Moringer shall have both cope and stole."

The baron proceeds to the Castle gate, which is bolted to prevent intrusion, while the inside of the mansion rung with preparations for the marriage of the lady. The pilgrim prayed the porter for entrance, conjuring him by his own sufferings, and for the sake of the late Moringer; by the orders of his lady, the warder gave him admittance.

"Then up the hall paced Moringer, his step was sad and slow;  
It sat full heavy on his heart, none seemed their lord to know.  
He sat him on a lowly bench, oppressed with wo and wrong;  
Short while he sat, but ne'er to him seemed little space so long.

"Now spent was day, and feasting o'er, and come was evening hour,  
The time was nigh when new made brides retire to nuptial bower,  
'Our Castle's wont,' a bride's man said, 'hath been both firm and long--  
No guest to harbour in our halls till he shall chant a song."

When thus called upon, the disguised baron sung the following melancholy ditty:--

"Chill flows the lay of frozen age,' 'twas thus the pilgrim sung,  
'Nor golden mead, nor garment gay, unlocks his heavy tongue.  
Once did I sit, thou bridegroom gay, at board as rich as thine,  
And by my side as fair a bride, with all her charms, was mine.

"But time traced furrows on my face, and I grew silver hair'd,  
For locks of brown, and cheeks of youth, she left this brow and beard;  
Once rich, but now a palmer poor, I tread life's latest stage,  
And mingle with your bridal mirth the lay of frozen age."

The lady, moved at the doleful recollections which the palmer's song recalled, sent to him a cup of wine. The palmer, having exhausted the goblet, returned it, and having first dropped in the cup his nuptial ring, requested the lady to pledge her venerable guest.

"The ring hath caught the lady's eye, she views it close and near,  
Then might you hear her shriek aloud, 'The Moringer is here!'  
Then might you see her start from seat, while tears in torrents fell,  
But if she wept for joy or wo, the ladies best can tell.

"Full loud she utter'd thanks to Heaven, and every saintly power,  
That had restored the Moringer before the midnight hour;  
And loud she utter'd vow on vow, that never was there bride,  
That had like her preserved her troth, or been so sorely tried.

"Yes, here I claim the praise,' she said, 'to constant matrons due,  
Who keep the troth, that they have plight, so stedfastly and true;  
For count the term howe'er you will, so that you count aright,  
Seven twelvemonths and a day are out when bells toll twelve to-night.'

"It was Marstetten then rose up, his falchion there he drew,  
He kneeled before The Moringer, and down his weapon threw;  
'My oath and knightly faith are broke,' these were the words he said;  
'Then take, my liege, thy vassal's sword, and take thy vassal's head.

"The noble Moringer, he smiled, and then aloud did say,  
'He gathers wisdom that hath roamed seven twelvemonths and a day,  
My daughter now hath fifteen years, fame speaks her sweet and fair;  
I give her for the bride you lose, and name her for my heir.

"The young bridegroom hath youthful bride, the old bridegroom the old,  
Whose faith were kept till term and tide so punctually were told.  
But blessings on the warder kind that oped my castle gate,  
For had I come at morrow tide, I came a day too late."

There is also, in the rich field of German romance, another edition of this story, which has been converted by M. Tieck (whose labours of that kind have been so remarkable) into the subject of one of his romantic dramas. It is, however, unnecessary to detail

it, as the present author adopted his idea of the tale chiefly from the edition preserved in the mansion of Haighhall, of old the mansion-house of the family of Braidshaigh, now possessed by their descendants on the female side, the Earls of Balcarras. The story greatly resembles that of the Noble Moringer, only there is no miracle of St. Thomas to shock the belief of good Protestants. I am permitted, by my noble friends, the lord and lady of Haighhall, to print the following extract from the family genealogy.

Sir William Bradshage 2d  
Sone to Sr John was a  
great traveller and a  
Souldyer and married  
To  
Mabell daughter and  
Sole heire of Hugh  
Noris de Haghe and  
Blackrode and had issue  
EN. 8. E 2.

of this Mabel is a story by tradition of undouted verity that in Sr William Bradshage's absence (being 10 yeares away in the wares) she married a welsh kt. Sr William retorninge from the wars came in a Palmers habit amongst the Poore to haghe. Who when she saw & congetringe that that he favoured her former husband wept, for which the kt chasticed her at wich Sr William went and made him selfe Knawne to his Tennants in wch space the kt fled, but neare to Newton Parke Sr William overtooke him and slue him. The said Dame Mabell was enjoyned by her confessor to doe Pennances by going onest every week barefout and bare legg'd to a Crosse ner Wigan from the haghe wildest she lived & is called Mabb to this day; & ther monument Lyes in wigan Church as you see ther Portrd.  
An: Dom: 1315.

There were many vestiges around Haighhall, both of the Catholic penances of the Lady Mabel, and the history of this unfortunate transaction in particular; the whole history was within the memory of man portrayed upon a glass window in the hall, where unfortunately it has not been preserved. Mab's Cross is still extant. An old ruinous building is said to have been the place where the Lady Mabel was condemned to render penance, by walking hither from Haighhall barefooted and barelegged for the performance of her devotions. This relic, to which an anecdote so curious is annexed, is now unfortunately ruinous. Time and whitewash, says Mr. Roby, have altogether defaced the effigies of the knight and lady on the tomb. The particulars are preserved in Mr. Roby's Traditions of Lancashire, [Footnote: A very elegant work, 2 vols. 1829. By J. Roby, M.R.S.L.] to which the reader is referred for further particulars. It does not appear that Sir William Braidshaigh was irreparably offended against the too hasty Lady Mabel, although he certainly showed himself of a more fiery mould than the Scottish and German barons who were heroes of the former tales. The tradition, which the author knew very early in life, was told to him by the late Lady Balcarras. He was so much

struck with it, that being at that time profuse of legendary lore, he inserted it in the shape of a note to Waverley, the first of his romantic offences. Had he then known, as he now does, the value of such a story, it is likely that, as directed in the inimitable receipt for making an epic poem, preserved in the Guardian, he would have kept it for some future opportunity.

As, however, the tale had not been completely told, and was a very interesting one, and as it was sufficiently interwoven with the Crusades, the wars between the Welsh and the Norman lords of the Marches was selected as a period when all freedoms might be taken with the strict truth of history without encountering any well known fact which might render the narrative improbable. Perhaps, however, the period which vindicates the probability of the tale, will, with its wars and murders, be best found described in the following passage of Gryffyth Ap Edwin's wars.

"This prince in conjunction with Algar, Earl of Chester, who had been banished from England as a traitor, in the reign of Edward the Confessor, marched into Herefordshire and wasted all that fertile country with fire and sword, to revenge the death of his brother Rhees, whose head had been brought to Edward in pursuance of an order sent by the King on account of the depredations which he had committed against the English on the borders. To stop these ravages the Earl of Hereford, who was nephew to Edward, advanced with an army, not of English alone, but of mercenary Normans and French, whom he had entertained in his service, against Gryffyth and Algar. He met them near Hereford, and offered them battle, which the Welsh monarch, who had won five pitched battles before, and never had fought without conquering, joyfully accepted. The earl had commanded his English forces to fight on horseback, in imitation of the Normans, against their usual custom; but the Welsh making a furious and desperate charge, that nobleman himself, and the foreign cavalry led by him, were so daunted at the view of them, that they shamefully fled without fighting; which being seen by the English, they also turned their backs on the enemy, who, having killed or wounded as many of them as they could come up with in their flight, entered triumphantly into Hereford, spoiled and fired the city, razed the walls to the ground, slaughtered some of the citizens, led many of them captive, and (to use the words of the Welsh Chronicle) left nothing in the town but blood and ashes. After this exploit they immediately returned into Wales, undoubtedly from a desire of securing their prisoners, and the rich plunder they had gained. The King of England hereupon commanded Earl Harold to collect a great army from all parts of the kingdom, and assembling them at Gloucester, advanced from thence to invade the dominions of Gryffyth in North Wales. He performed his orders, and penetrated into that country without resistance from the Welsh; Gryffyth and Algar returning into some parts of South Wales. What were their reasons for this conduct we are not well informed; nor why Harold did not pursue his advantage against them; but it appears that he thought it more advisable at this time to treat with, than subdue, them; for he left North Wales, and employed himself in rebuilding the walls of Hereford, while negotiations were carrying on with Gryffyth which soon after produced the restoration of Algar, and a peace with that king, not very honourable to England, as he made no satisfaction for the mischief he had done in the war, nor any submissions to Edward. Harold must doubtless have had some private



and forcible motives to conclude such a treaty. The very next year the Welsh monarch, upon what quarrel we, know not, made a new incursion into England, and killed the Bishop of Hereford, the Sheriff of the county, and many more of the English, both ecclesiastics and laymen. Edward was counselled by Harold, and Leofrick, Earl of Mercia, to make peace with him again; which he again broke; nor could he be restrained by any means, from these barbarous inroads, before the year one, thousand and sixty-three; when Edward, whose patience and pacific disposition had been too much abused, commissioned

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