ВАЛЬТЕР СКОТТ

THE PROSE MARMION

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Содержание

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The Prose Marmion A Tale of the Scottish Border

INTRODUCTION

Sir Walter Scott, poet and novelist, was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, five years before the Declaration of Independence in America. Unlike most little Scotch boys, he was not sturdy and robust, and in his second year, a lameness appeared that never entirely left him. Being frail and delicate, he received the most tender care from parents and grandparents. Five consecutive years of his life, from the age of three to the age of eight, were spent on his grandfather's farm at Sandyknow. At the end of this period, he returned to Edinburgh greatly improved in health, and soon after, entered the high school, where he remained four years. A course at the university followed the high school, but Scott never gained distinction as a scholar. He loved romances, old plays, travels, and poetry too well, ever to become distinguished in philosophy, mathematics, or the dry study of dead languages.

In his early years, he had formed a taste for ballad literature, which very significantly influenced, if it did not wholly determine, the character of his writings. The historical incidents upon which the ballads were founded, their traditional legends, affected him profoundly, and he wished to become at once a poet of chivalry, a writer of romance. His father, however, had other plans for his son, and the lad was made a lawyer's apprentice in the father's office. Continuing, as recreation, his reading, he gave six years to the study of law, being admitted to the bar when only twenty-one. For years, he cultivated literature as a relaxation from business.

At the age of twenty-six he married, and about this time accepted the office of deputy sheriff of Selkirkshire, largely moved to do so by his unwillingness to rely upon his pen for support. Nine years later, 1806, through family influence he was appointed, at a good salary, to one of the chief clerkships in the Scottish court of sessions. The fulfillment of his long-cherished desire of abandoning his labors as an advocate, in order to devote himself to literature, was now at hand. He had already delighted the public by various early literary efforts, the most important being the "Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border," parts of which had occupied him since childhood. This was followed by "Sir Tristrem" and the "Lay of the Last Minstrel." Scott was now enrolled among the poets of the day, and while never neglecting the duties of office, he entered upon his literary career with unflagging industry. "Marmion," "The Lady of the Lake," "Don Roderick," and "Rokeby" reflected his romantic fervor.

Lord Byron now had entered the field of letters, and Scott, conscious of the power of his rival, determined to seek fame in other than poetic paths. This determination produced "Waverly," whose success gave birth to Scott's desire to be numbered among the landed gentry of the country. Under the influence of this passion, the novels now associated with his name followed with startling rapidity, and their growth developed in the author an unwillingness to be known as a penman writing for fortune. Literary fame was less dear to him than the upbuilding of a family name. The novels went for a time fatherless, but the baronial mansion, still one of the most famous shrines of the curious, grew into the stately proportions of Abbotsford.

In 1820. George IV. conferred upon Scott the baronetcy, dearer than all the plaudits of the public. But

"Giddy chance never bears,
That mortal bliss shall last for years,"

and the failure of banker and of publisher disclosed that the landed baronet had been a silent partner in the house of his printer for a quarter of a century, for whose debts Scott was liable to the extent of one hundred thousand pounds and to his bankers for enough more to make the entire debt one hundred fifty thousand pounds. Unappalled by the loss, Scott refused all offers of release from his creditors, and began to pay the debt by means of his pen, determined to preserve Abbotsford to his children's children. At a dinner given in 1827, he threw off all disguise, and acknowledged the authorship of the Waverly novels.

His great exertions brought on paralysis. A visit to Italy failed to improve his condition, and he returned to die on the banks of the Tweed, and to be laid at rest in Dreyburg Abbey. He had paid one hundred thousand pounds of the debt, and the publishers of his works had sufficient confidence in their sale to advance the remaining fifty thousand pounds, the estate thus being left free of encumbrance.

Of his four children, two sons and two daughters, none left male issue. A grandchild, the wife of Robert Hope, was permitted by Parliament to assume the name of Scott, and her son Walter, at the age of twenty-one, was knighted by Queen Victoria.

Edinburgh has erected to his memory a most graceful monument, and Westminster Abbey a memorial. Visitors, under certain limitations, are permitted to visit the mansion, to see the enchanted library, and the famous study, to stray about the grounds where the famous writer spent the happiest, as well as the saddest, years of his life.

CHAPTER I

In all the border country that lies between England and Scotland, no castle stands more fair than Norham. Fast by its rock-ribbed walls flows the noble Tweed, and on its battled towers frown the hills of Cheviot.

Day was dying, St. George's banner, broad and gay, hung in the evening breeze that scarce had power to wave it o'er the keep. Warriors on the turrets were moving across the sky like giants, their armor flashing back the gleam of the setting sun, when a horseman dashed forward, spurred on his proud steed, and blew his bugle before the dark archway of the castle. The warder, knowing well the horn he heard, hastened from the wall and warned the captain of the guard. At once was given the command, "Make the entrance free! Let every minstrel, every herald, every squire, prepare to receive Lord Marmion, who waits below!" The iron-studded gate was unbarred, the portcullis raised, the drawbridge dropped, and proudly across it, stepped a red roan charger, bearing the noble guest.

Lord Marmion was a stalwart knight, whose visage told of many a battle. The scar on his brown cheek spoke of Bosworth Field, and the fire that burned in his eye showed a spirit still proud. The lines of care on his brow, and the threads of silver in his black curling hair, spoke less of age than of toil. The square-turned joints, the evident strength of body and limb, bespoke not a carpet-knight, but a grim champion. From head to foot, he was clad in mail of Milan steel. His helmet of embossed gold hung at the saddle-bow. A falcon hovered in the crest, and soared on the azure field of the noble lord's shield, above the motto, "Who checks at me, to death is dight!"

The horse was as richly clad as its rider. The reins were embroidered in blue, and ribbons of the same color decked the arched neck and mane. The housings were of blue trapped with gold.

Behind the leader, rode gallant squires of noble name. Though still a squire, each had well earned knighthood. Each could tame a war horse, draw a bow, wield a sword, dance in the hall, carve at the board, frame love ditties, and sing them to fair ladies.

Next in the train, came four men-at-arms: two carried halbert, bill, axe, and lance; a third led the sumpter mules and the ambling palfrey, which served to bear Lord Marmion when he wished to relieve his battle steed; the most trusty of the four held on high the pennon, furled in its glossy blue streamers. Last were twenty yeomen, two and two, in blue jerkins, black hose, and wearing falcons embroidered on each breast. At their belts hung quivers, and in their hands were boar-spears, tough and strong. They knew the art of hunting by lake or in wood, could bend a six-foot bow, or, at the behest of their lord, send far the cloth-yard spear.

To welcome Marmion, the Flower of English Chivalry, the soldiers of the guard of Norham stood in the castle yard, with reversed pike and spear. Minstrels and trumpeters were there, the welcome was prepared, and as the train entered, a clang sounded through turret and tower, such as the old castle had seldom heard.

Trumpets flourished, the martial airs rang out as Marmion crossed the court, scattering angels among the ranks. Loud rose the cry:

"Welcome to Norham, Marmion!
Stout heart and open hand!
Thou flower of English land!"

Two pursuivants stood at the entrance to the donjon, and hailed the guest as Lord of Fontenaye, of Lutterward, Scrivelbaye, of "Tamworth tower and town." To requite their courtesy, Marmion, as he alighted, hung about the neck of each a chain of twelve marks.

"Largesse, largesse, knight of the crest of gold!" cried the heralds, in acknowledgment of the bounty received;

"'A blazon'd shield in battle won,
Ne'er guarded heart so bold.'"

As they marshalled him to the castle hall, the guests stood aside, and again the trumpets flourished, and the heralds cried:

"'Room, lordlings, room for Lord Marmion,
With the crest and helm of gold!
Full well we know the trophies won
In the lists at Cottiswold:
There, vainly Ralph de Wilton strove
'Gainst Marmion's force to stand;
To him he lost his lady-love,
And to the King his land.
Ourselves beheld the listed field,
A sight both sad and fair;
We saw Lord Marmion pierce the shield,
And saw the saddle bare;
We saw the victor win the crest
He wears with worthy pride;
And on the gibbet-tree, reversed,
His foeman's scutcheon tied.
Place, nobles, for the Falcon-Knight!
Room, room, ye gentles gay,
For him who conquered in the right,
Marmion of Fontenaye!'"

As the welcome died away, forth stepped Sir Hugh, lord of the castle. He led his visitor to the raised dais and placed him in the seat of honor, while a northern harper chanted a rude hymn. The ear of Marmion could scarcely brook the barbarous sound, yet much he praised, well knowing that,

"Lady's suit, and minstrel's strain,
By knight should ne'er be heard in vain."

As the weird strains died away, the host pressed the English lord to bide long as a guest, promising rest for horse, and refreshment and pleasure for man, with many a joust, or feat at arms, for those who wished to learn northern ways.

At this the brow of Marmion grew dark and stern. Sir Hugh marked the changed look, and pouring out a bowl of sparkling wine, said:

"'Now pledge me here, Lord Marmion:
But first I pray thee fair,
Where hast thou left that page of thine,
Whose beauty was so rare?
When last in Raby towers we met,
The boy I closely eyed,
And often marked his cheeks were wet
With tears he fain would hide.'"

Lord Marmion ill concealed his rising anger, yet he made a calm reply.

"The lad was too frail to endure the northern climate, and I have left him at Lindisfarne. May I ask, Lord Heron, why the lady of the castle disdains to grace the hall to-day? Is it because Marmion of Fontenaye is present?"

The Knight replied:

"Norham Castle is a grim, dull cage for a bird so beautiful as the lady of Heron, and with my consent she sits with the noble and fair Queen Margaret, the bride of royal James."

"Ah!" replied the Heron's noble guest, "if this be so, I will gladly bear to her your tender messages. I am now, by the request of our good English King, on my way to the court of Scotland, to learn why James is gathering troops, why making warlike preparations, and, if it be possible, I am to persuade him to maintain the peace. From your great goodness, I make bold to ask for myself and for my train a trusty guide. I have not ridden in Scotland since James backed Richard, Duke of York, in his pretensions to the throne of England. Then, as you remember, I marched with Surrey's forces, and razed to the ground the tower of Aytoun."

"For such need, my lord, trust old Norham gray. Here are guides who have spurred far on Scottish ground, who have tasted the ale of St. Bothan, driven off the beeves of Lauderdale, and fired homes that the inmates might have light by which to dress themselves."

"In good sooth," replied Lord Marmion, "were I bent on war, a better guard I could not wish, but I go in form of peace, a friendly messenger to a foreign King. A plundering border spear might arouse suspicious fears, and the deadly feud, the thirst for blood, break out in unseemly broil. More fitting as guide, would be a friar, a pardoner, traveling priest, or strolling pilgrim."

Sir Hugh musingly passed his hand over his brow, and then replied: "Fain would I find the guide you need, but, though a bishop built this castle, few holy brethren resort here. If the priest of Shoreswood were here, he could rein your wildest horse, but no spearsman in the hall will sooner strike or join in fray. Friar John of Tilmouth is the very man! He is a blithesome brother, a welcome guest in hall and hut. He knows each castle, town and tower in which the ale and wine are good. He now seldom leaves these walls, but, perchance, in your guard he will go."

In the pause that followed, young Selby, nephew of the Earl of Norham, respectfully said, "Kind uncle, unhappy we, if harm came to Friar John. When time hangs heavy in the hall, and the snow lies deep at Christmas tide, when we can neither hunt nor joust, who will sing the carols, and sweep away the stake at bowls? Who will lead the games and gambols? Let Friar John in safety fill his chimney corner, roast hissing crabs, or empty the flagons. Last night, there came to Norham Castle a fitter guide for Lord Marmion."

"Nephew," said Sir Hugh, "well hast thou spoke. Say on."

"There came here, direct from Rome, one who hath visited the blessed tomb, and worshipped in each holy spot of Arabia and Palestine. He hath been on the hills where rested Noah's Ark; he hath walked by the Red Sea; in Sinai's Wilderness, he saw the mount where Moses received the law. He knows the passes of the North, and is on his way to distant shrines beyond the Forth. Little he eats, and drinks only of stream or lake. He is a fit guide for moor and fell."

"Gramercy!" exclaimed Lord Marmion. "Loth would I be to take Friar John, if this Palmer will lead us as far as Holy-Rood. I'll pay him not in beads and cockle shells, but in 'angels' fair and good. I love such holy ramblers. They know how to charm each weary hill with song or romance.

"'Some jovial tale, or glee, or jest,
They bring to cheer the way.'"

"Ah! sire," said young Selby, as he laid his finger on his lip in token of silence, "this man knows more than he has ever learned from holy lore. Last night, we listened at his cell, and strange

things we heard. He muttered on till dawn. No conscience clear and void of evil intent remains so long awake to pray."

"Let it pass," cried Marmion. "This man and he only shall guide me on my way, though he and the arch fiend were sworn friends. So, please you, gentle youth, call this Palmer to the castle hall."

Little did Marmion dream that the Palmer was Ralph de Wilton, his deadliest foe, in disguise – Ralph de Wilton, his rival in love, whom Marmion had accused of treason, had caused to be sent into exile, and whom he supposed dead.

A moment later the Palmer appeared, clad in a black mantle and cowl, and wearing on his shoulders the keys of St. Peter cut in cloth of red. His cap, bordered with scallop shells, fitted close to his head, and over all was drawn the cowl. His sandals were travel-worn. In his hands he bore a staff and palm branch, emblems of the pilgrim from the holy land. No lord or knight was there in the hall who had a more stately step, none who looked more proud. He waited not for salutation, but strode across the hall of state, and fronted Marmion, as peer meets peer. Beneath the cowl was a face so wan, so worn, a cheek so sunken, and an eye so wild, that the mother would not have known her child, much less Marmion, his rival.

Danger, travel, want, and woe soon change the form. Deadly fear can outstrip time; toil quenches the fire of youth; and despair traces wrinkles deeper than old age.

"Happy whom none of these befall;
But this poor Palmer knew them all."

Lord Marmion made known his request, and the Palmer took upon himself the task of guide, on condition that they set out without delay, saying:

"'But I have solemn vows to pay
And may not linger by the way;
Saint Mary grant that cave or spring
May back to peace my bosom bring,
Or bid it throb no more!'"

Then the page, on bended knee, presented to each guest in turn the massive silver bowl of wassail, "the midnight draught of sleep," rich with wine and spices. Lord Marmion drank, "Sound sleep to all"; the earl pledged his noble guest; all drained it merrily except the Palmer. He alone refused, although Selby urged him most courteously. The feast was over, the sound of minstrel hushed. Nought was heard in the castle but the slow footsteps of the guard.

At dawn the chapel doors unclosed, and after a hasty mass from Friar John, a rich repast was served to knight and squire.

"Lord Marmion's bugles blew to horse:
Then came the stirrup-cup in course;
Between the Baron and his host
No point of courtesy was lost;
Till, filing from the gate, had passed
That noble train, their Lord the last.
Then loudly rang the trumpet call;
Thundered the cannon from the wall,
And shook the Scottish shore;
Around the castle eddied slow,
Volumes of smoke as white as snow,

And hid its turrets hoar;
Till they rolled forth upon the air,
And met the river breezes there."

CHAPTER II

The breeze which swept away the rolling smoke from Norham, curled not the Tweed alone. Far upon Northumbrian waters, it blew fresh and strong, bearing on its wings a barque from the Abbey of Whitby on the coast of Yorkshire, sailing to St. Cuthbert's at Lindisfarne, on Holy Isle.

"The merry seamen laugh'd to see
Their gallant ship so lustily
Furrow the green sea-foam.
Much joy'd they in their honor'd freight;
For, on the deck, in chair of state,
The Abbess of Saint Hilda placed,
With five fair nuns, the galley graced.

"'T was sweet to see these holy maids,
Like birds escaped to green-wood shades,
Their first flight from the cage;
How timid, and how curious, too,
For all to them was strange and new,
And all the common sights they view,
Their wonderment engage."

Light-hearted were they all, except the Abbess and the novice Clare. Fair, kind, and noble, the Abbess had early taken the veil. Her hopes, her fears, her joys, were bounded by the cloister walls; her highest ambition being to raise St. Hilda's fame. For this she gave her ample fortune – to build its bowers, to adorn its chapels with rare and quaint carvings, and to deck the relic shrine with ivory and costly gems. The poor and the pilgrim blessed her bounty and shelter.

Her pale cheek and spare form were made more striking by the black Benedictine garb. Vigils and penitence had dimmed the luster of her eyes. Though proud of her religious sway and its severity, she loved her maidens and was loved by them in return.

The purpose of the present voyage was most unhappy, and to the Abbess most painful. She came to Lindisfarne upon the summons of St. Cuthbert's Abbot, to hold with him and the Prioress of Tynemouth an inquisition on two apostates from the faith, if need were, to condemn them to death.

On the galley's prow sat the unhappy sister Clare, young and beautiful, lovely and guileless, as yet a nun unprofessed. She had been betrothed to Ralph de Wilton, whom she supposed now dead, or worse, a dishonored fugitive. After the disgrace brought upon her lover, Clare had been commanded by her guardians to give her hand to Lord Marmion, who loved her for her lands alone. Heartbroken at the fate of her true-love, and to escape this hateful marriage, she was about to take the vestal vow, and in the gloom of St. Hilda hide her blasted hopes, her youth and beauty.

As the vessel glided over the waters, she gazed into their depths, seeing only a sun-scorched desert, waste and bare, where no wave murmured, no breeze sighed. Again she saw a loved form on the burning sands: the dear dead, denied even the simplest rites of burial.

Now the vessel skirted the coast of mountainous Northumberland. Towns, towers, and halls, successive rose before the delighted group of maidens. Tynemouth's Priory appeared, and as they passed, the fair nuns told their beads. At length the Holy Island was reached. The tide was at its flood. Twice each day, pilgrims dry-shod might find their way to the island; and twice each day the waves beat high between the island and the shore, effacing all marks of pilgrim's staff and sandalled foot.

As the galley flew to the port, higher and higher, the castle and its battled towers rose to view, a huge, solemn, dark-red pile. In Saxon strength the massive arches broad and round, row on row, supported by short, ponderous columns, frowned upon the approaching visitor. It stood at the very water's edge, and had been built long before the birth of Gothic architecture. On its walls the tempestuous sea and heathen Dane alike had vainly poured their impious rage. For more than a thousand years, wind, wave, and warrior had been held at bay. The deep walls of the old abbey still stood worn but unsubdued.

As they drew near, the maidens raised St. Hilda's song. Borne on the wind over the wave, their voices met a response of welcome in the chorus which arose upon the shore. Soon, bearing banner, cross, and relic, monks and nuns filed in order from the grim cloister down to the harbor, echoing back the hymn. Among her maidens, conspicuous in veil and hood, stood the Abbess, even then engaged in holy devotion.

When the reception at harbor and hall was over, and the evening banquet ended, the vestal maidens and their visitors, secure from unhallowed eyes, roamed at will through each holy cloister, aisle, gallery, and dome. Though it was a summer night, the evening fell damp and chill, the sea breeze blowing cold, and the pure-minded girls closed around the blazing hearth, each in turn to paint the glory of her favorite saint.

While, round the fire, legends were rehearsed by the happy group, a very different scene was taking place in a secret underground aisle, where a council of life and death was being held. The spot was more dark and lone than a dungeon cell. Light and air were excluded, as it was a burial place for those who, dying in sin, might not be laid within the Church. It was also a place of punishment, whence if a cry pierced the upper air, the hearer offered a prayer, thinking he heard the moaning of spirits in torment.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.