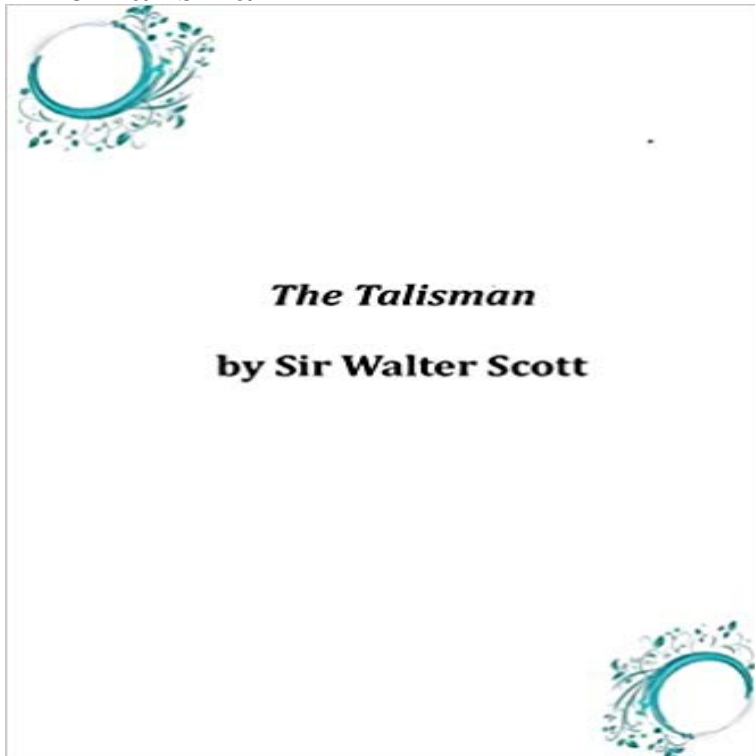


The Talisman



The Betrothed did not greatly please one or two friends, who thought that it did not well correspond to the general title of The Crusaders. They urged, therefore, that, without direct allusion to the manners of the Eastern tribes, and to the romantic conflicts of the period, the title of a Tale of the Crusaders would resemble the playbill, which is said to have announced the tragedy of Hamlet, the character of the Prince of Denmark being left out. On the other hand, I felt the difficulty of giving a vivid picture of a part of the world with which I was almost totally unacquainted, unless by early recollections of the Arabian Nights Entertainments; and not only did I labour under the incapacity of ignorance in which, as far as regards Eastern manners, I was as thickly wrapped as an Egyptian in his fog but my contemporaries were, many of them, as much enlightened upon the subject as if they had been inhabitants of the favoured land of Goshen. The love of travelling had pervaded all ranks, and carried the subjects of Britain into all quarters of the world. Greece, so attractive by its remains of art, by its struggles for freedom against a Mohammedan tyrant, by its very name, where every fountain had its classical legend Palestine, endeared to the imagination by yet more sacred remembrances had been of late surveyed by British eyes, and described by recent travellers. Had I, therefore, attempted the difficult task of substituting manners of my own invention, instead of the genuine costume of the East, almost every traveller I met who had extended his route beyond what was anciently called The Grand Tour, had acquired a right, by ocular inspection, to chastise me for my presumption. Every member of the Travellers Club who could pretend to have thrown his shoe over Edom was, by having done so, constituted my lawful critic and corrector. It occurred, therefore, that where the author of Anastasius, as well as he of Hadji Baba,

had described the manners and vices of the Eastern nations, not only with fidelity, but with the humour of Le Sage and the ludicrous power of Fielding himself, one who was a perfect stranger to the subject must necessarily produce an unfavourable contrast. The Poet Laureate also, in the charming tale of Thalaba, had shown how extensive might be the researches of a person of acquirements and talent, by dint of investigation alone, into the ancient doctrines, history, and manners of the Eastern countries, in which we are probably to look for the cradle of mankind; Moore, in his Lalla Rookh, had successfully trod the same path; in which, too, Byron, joining ocular experience to extensive reading, had written some of his most attractive poems. In a word, the Eastern themes had been already so successfully handled by those who were acknowledged to be masters of their craft, that I was diffident of making the attempt.

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