

**The Brethren**

**By**

**H. Rider Haggard**

## Dedication

R.M.S. Mongolia, 12th May, 1904 Mayhap, Ella, here too distance lends its enchantment, and these gallant brethren would have quarrelled over Rosamund, or even had their long swords at each other's throat. Mayhap that Princess and heroine might have failed in the hour of her trial and never earned her saintly crown. Mayhap the good horse "Smoke" would have fallen on the Narrow Way, leaving false Lozelle a victor, and Masouda, the royal-hearted, would have offered up a strangely different sacrifice upon the altars of her passionate desire.

Still, let us hold otherwise, though we grow grey and know the world for what it is. Let us for a little time think as we thought while we were young; when faith knew no fears for anything and death had not knocked upon our doors; when you opened also to my childish eyes that gate of ivory and pearl which leads to the blessed kingdom of Romance.

At the least I am sure, and I believe that you, my sister, will

agree with me, that, above and beyond its terrors and its pitfalls, Imagination has few finer qualities, and none, perhaps, more helpful to our hearts, than those which enable us for an hour to dream that men and women, their fortunes and their fate, are as we would fashion them.

H. Rider Haggard. To Mrs. Maddison Green.

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"Two lovers by the maiden sate, Without a glance of jealous hate; The maid her lovers sat between, With open brow and equal mien;--It is a sight but rarely spied, Thanks to man's wrath and woman's pride."

Scott

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Standing a while ago upon the flower-clad plain above Tiberius, by the Lake of Galilee, the writer gazed at the double peaks of the Hill of Hattin. Here, or so tradition says, Christ preached the Sermon on the Mount--that perfect rule of gentleness and peace. Here, too--and this is certain--after nearly twelve centuries had gone by, Yusuf Salah-ed-din, whom we know as the Sultan Saladin, crushed the Christian power in Palestine in perhaps the most terrible battle which that land of blood has known. Thus the Mount of the Beatitudes became the Mount of Massacre.

Whilst musing on these strangely-contrasted scenes enacted in one place there arose in his mind a desire to weave, as best he might, a tale wherein any who are drawn to the romance of that pregnant and mysterious epoch, when men by thousands were glad to lay down their lives for visions and spiritual hopes, could find

a picture, however faint and broken, of the long war between Cross and Crescent waged among the Syrian plains and deserts. Of Christian knights and ladies also, and their loves and sufferings in England and the East; of the fearful lord of the Assassins whom the Franks called Old Man of the Mountain, and his fortress city, Masyaf. Of the great-hearted, if at times cruel Saladin and his fierce Saracens; of the rout at Hattin itself, on whose rocky height the Holy Rood was set up as a standard and captured, to be seen no more by Christian eyes; and of the last surrender, whereby the Crusaders lost Jerusalem forever.

Of that desire this story is the fruit.

## PROLOGUE

Salah-ed-din, Commander of the Faithful, the king Strong to Aid, Sovereign of the East, sat at night in his palace at Damascus and brooded on the wonderful ways of God, by Whom he had been lifted to his high estate. He remembered how, when he was but small in the eyes of men, Nour-ed-din, king of Syria, forced him to accompany his uncle, Shirkuh, to Egypt, whither he went, "like one driven to his death," and how, against his own will, there he rose to greatness. He thought of his father, the wise Ayoub, and the brethren with whom he was brought up, all of them dead now save one; and of his sisters, whom he had cherished. Most of all did he think of her, Zobeide, who had been stolen away by the knight whom she loved even to the loss of her own soul--yes, by the English friend of his youth, his father's prisoner, Sir Andrew D'Arcy, who, led astray by passion, had done him and his house this grievous wrong. He had sworn, he remembered, that he would bring her back even from England, and already had planned to kill her husband and capture her when he learned her death. She had left a child, or so his spies told him, who, if she still lived, must be a woman now--his own niece, though half of noble English blood.

Then his mind wandered from this old, half-forgotten story to the

woe and blood in which his days were set, and to the last great struggle between the followers of the prophets Jesus and Mahomet, that Jihad [Holy War] for which he made ready--and he sighed. For he was a merciful man, who loved not slaughter, although his fierce faith drove him from war to war.

Salah-ed-din slept and dreamed of peace. In his dream a maiden stood before him. Presently, when she lifted her veil, he saw that she was beautiful, with features like his own, but fairer, and knew her surely for the daughter of his sister who had fled with the English knight. Now he wondered why she visited him thus, and in his vision prayed Allah to make the matter clear. Then of a sudden he saw this same woman standing before him on a Syrian plain, and on either side of her a countless host of Saracens and Franks, of whom thousands and tens of thousands were appointed to death. Lo! he, Salah-ed-din, charged at the head of his squadrons, scimitar aloft, but she held up her hand and stayed him.

"What do you hear, my niece?" he asked.

"I am come to save the lives of men through you," she answered; "therefore was I born of your blood, and therefore I am sent to you. Put up your sword, King, and spare them."

"Say, maiden, what ransom do you bring to buy this multitude from



doom? What ransom, and what gift?"

"The ransom of my own blood freely offered, and Heaven's gift of peace to your sinful soul, O King." And with that outstretched hand she drew down his keen-edged scimitar until it rested on her breast.

Salah-ed-din awoke, and marvelled on his dream, but said nothing of it to any man. The next night it returned to him, and the memory of it went with him all the day that followed, but still he said nothing.

When on the third night he dreamed it yet again, even more vividly, then he was sure that this thing was from God, and summoned his holy Imauns and his Diviners, and took counsel with them. These, after they had listened, prayed and consulted, spoke thus:

"O Sultan, Allah has warned you in shadows that the woman, your niece, who dwells far away in England, shall by her own nobleness and sacrifice, in some time to come, save you from shedding a sea of blood, and bring rest upon the land. We charge you, therefore, draw this lady to your court, and keep her ever by your side, since if she escape you, her peace goes with her."

Salah-ed-din said that this interpretation was wise and true, for

thus also he had read his dream. Then he summoned a certain false knight who bore the Cross upon his breast, but in secret had accepted the Koran, a Frankish spy of his, who came from that country where dwelt the maiden, his niece, and from him learned about her, her father, and her home. With him and another spy who passed as a Christian palmer, by the aid of Prince Hassan, one of the greatest and most trusted of his Emirs, he made a cunning plan for the capture of the maiden if she would not come willingly, and for her bearing away to Syria.

Moreover--that in the eyes of all men her dignity might be worthy of her high blood and fate--by his decree he created her, the niece whom he had never seen, Princess of Baalbec, with great possessions--a rule that her grandfather, Ayoub, and her uncle, Izzeddin, had held before her. Also he purchased a stout galley of war, manning it with proved sailors and with chosen men-at-arms, under the command of the Prince Hassan, and wrote a letter to the English lord, Sir Andrew D'Arcy, and to his daughter, and prepared a royal gift of jewels, and sent them to the lady, his niece, far away in England, and with it the Patent of her rank. Her he commanded this company to win by peace, or force, or fraud, as best they might, but that without her not one of them should dare to look upon his face again. And with these he sent the two Frankish spies, who knew the place where the lady lived, one of whom, the false knight, was a skilled mariner and the captain of the ship.

These things did Yusuf Salah-ed-din, and waited patiently till it should please God to accomplish the vision with which God had filled his soul in sleep.