

MMES
MADRID MASTERS IN ENGLISH STUDIES
UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE MADRID

GOTHIC BOURNES

THE DEVIL'S LADDER.

(1826)

TRANSCRIPTION BY
Incihan Hotaman

EDITING GOTHIC TEXTS
SIXTH SERIES, 2019
Nº 5

**LEGENDS OF TERROR !
AND
TALES
OF THE
WONDERFUL AND THE WILD.**

-
Original and Select

-
**IN PROSE AND VERSE
WITH HISTORICAL ILLUSTRATIONS**

London

PRINTED BY T. RICHARDSON, 95, HIGH HOLBORN

PUBLISHED BY SHERWOOD, GILBERT, AND PIPER, PATERNOSTER ROW ;

AND HUNTER, EDINBURGH

-
1826

<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=iGsAAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA80&lpg=PA80&dq=%22the+demon's+isle%22&source=bl&ots=VWNCFH0XU&sig=Jm71yaUag8ULK20JtgQ-2paeqyk&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjFqtr-x77PAhUBJx4KHRskBulQ6AEINDAF#v=onepage&q=%22the%20demon's%20isle%22&f=false>

THE DEVIL'S LADDER ;
OR,
THE GNOMES OF THE REDRICH.

—
From the German of Aloise Schreiber.¹
—

“ He spake —the elfin demon sternly spake²—
His tiny people gave attentive ear,
And bent to the earth submissive,
Then strait obeyed their leader's strict command ;
And slinging o'er their arms the gleamy spade
And ponderous axe, bore them with shoutings loud
From out the cavern's gloom, to the high Redrich's foot,
And quick as glancing thought, or lightning's quiv'ring flash
A hollow pathway broke thro³ the dark rock's deep soil,
To the high dwelling of the wond'ring maid.”

Not far from Lorrich, upon the extreme frontiers of the Rhine province, are still to be seen the ruins of an ancient castle, which was formerly inhabited by Sibö, of Lorrich, a knight of great courage, but of a character any thing rather than gentle. It happened once, in a stormy eve, that a little old man knocked at his castle-gate, and besought his hospitality,—a request which was not a little enforced by the shrill voice of the wind, as it whistled through his streaming locks, almost as white as the snows that fell fast about him. The knight, however, was not in one of his mildest moods, nor did the wild dwarfish figure of the stranger plead much for him with one who was by no means an admirer of poverty, whatever shape it might assume. His repulse, therefore, was not couched in the gentlest language ; and, indeed, deserved praise, rather for its energetic conciseness, than for any other quality. The little old man was equally sparing of words on his part, and simply saying, “ I will requite⁴ your kindness,” passed on his way with a most provoking serenity of temper.

¹ Aloys Wilhelm Schreiber was a German writer who also collected songs and wrote in many journals. This particular story might be from one of his many collections. Furthermore, it is known that two other English versions of the same story with the same ascription to Schreiber were published in different journals and gazettes.

² “Spake” is old version of the verb “speak” in Simple Past Tense

³ Through

⁴ According to Merriam-Webster another meaning of the verb “requite” is to avenge or to make retaliation of.

At the time, Sib0 did not take this threat very much to heart ; but it soon appeared to be something more than an empty menace ; for the next day he missed⁵ his daughter, a lovely girl in her tenth year, who was already celebrated for her beauty throughout the whole province. People were immediately sent out to seek her in every direction, and at last, the knight, finding none of his messengers return, set out himself for the same purpose. For a long time he was no more successful in the search than his vassals ; nobody had seen her, nobody could give him any information, till he met with an old shepherd, who said, “ That early in the day he had seen a young girl gathering flowers at the foot of the Redrich mountain ; that, in a little time after, several dwarfs had approached the child, and, having seized her in their arms, tripped up to the summit of the rock with as much facility as if they had been walking on a plain. God forbid!” added the shepherd, making the sign of the cross, “God forbid, that they were of those evil spirits who dwell in the hidden centre of the mountain : they are easily excited to anger, which is too often fatal to its victims.” The knight, alarmed at this recital, cast his eyes to the summit of the Redrich, and there, indeed, was Garlinda, who seemed to stretch forth her arms for assistance. Stung with all the impotence of passion, he instantly assembled his vassals, to see if there was not one among the number who could climb the precipice ; but, though several made the effort, none succeeded. He then ordered them to provide instruments for cutting a pathway in the rock ; this attempt, however, was not a jot more successful than the first, for no sooner had the workmen begun to use their axes, than such a shower of stones was poured upon their heads from the mountain-top, that they were compelled to fly for safety. At the same time a voice was heard, which seemed to proceed from the depths of the Redrich, and which distinctly uttered these words :—“ It is thus that we requite the hospitality of the knight of Lorrich.”

Sibo, finding earthly arms of no avail against the gnomes, had now recourse to heaven ; and as he had certain private reasons for distrusting the efficacy of his own prayers, he bribed the monks and nuns of the neighbourhood to employ their intercession. But these holy folks prospered no better with their beads than the peasants had done with their pick-axes ; the gnomes continued as immovable as their own mountain, and nothing was left to console the poor Sib0, except the certainty of his daughter’s living. His first looks at day-break, and his last at night-fall, were given to the Redrich, and each time he could see Garlinda on its summit, stretching out her little arms in mournful greeting to her father.

But, to do justice to the gnomes they took all possible care of their little foundling, and suffered her to want for nothing : they built for her a beautiful little cottage, the walls of which were covered with shells and crystals, and stones of a thousand colours. Their wives, too, made her necklaces of pearl and emerald wreaths, and found every hour some fresh amusements for her youth, which grew up in a continued round of delight, like a snow-drop in the first gentle visitings of the spring. Indeed, she seemed to

⁵ “Missed” here suggests “noticed the absence of”

be a general favourite, and more particularly so with one old gnome, the sister of him who had tempted her by the flowers on the Redrich. Often would she say to her pupil, when her young eyes were for a moment dimmed with a transient recollection of past times :—“ Be of good heart, my dear child ; I am preparing for you a dowry, such as was never yet given to the daughter of a king.”

Thus rolled away four years, and Sibó had nearly renounced all hope of again seeing his Garlinda, when Ruthelm, a young and valiant knight, returned from Hungary, where he had acquired a glorious name, by his deeds against the infidels. His castle being only half a league distant from Lorrích, he was not long in hearing of Sibó’s loss, upon which he determined to recover the fair fugitive, or perish in the attempt. With this design, he sought the old knight, who was still buried in grief for his daughter’s absence, and made him acquainted with his purpose. Sibó grasped the young warrior’s hand, and a smile, the first he had known for many years, passed over his hard features as he replied, “ Look out from this window, my gallant stranger ; as far as the eye can reach, it looks upon the lands of Sibó ; below, too, in the castle vaults, where others keep their prisoners, I lock up my gold, enough to purchase another such a province. Bring me back my daughter, and all this shall be yours,—and a prize beyond all this,—my daughter’s hand. Go forth, my young knight, and heaven’s blessing go with you.”

Ruthelm immediately betook himself to the foot of the Redrich to explore his ground, but he soon saw that it would be impossible to climb the mountain without aid from some quarter, for the sides were absolutely perpendicular. Still he was unwilling to give up his purpose ; he walked round and round the rock, exploring every cleft and cranny, wishing that he had wings, and cursing the shrubs that nodded their heads most triumphantly near the summit, as if in defiance of his efforts. Almost ready to burst with vexation, he was about to desist, when the mountain-gnome stood before him on a sudden, and thus accosted him:—

“Ho ! ho ! my spruce knight ; you have heard, it seems, of the beautiful Garlinda, whose abode is on the summit of these rocks. Is it not so, my mighty man of arms ? Well, I’ll be your friend in this business : she is my pupil, and I promise you she is yours, as soon as you can get her.”

“ Be it so,” replied the knight, holding out his hand in token that the offer was accepted.

“ I am but a dwarf in comparison with you,” replied the little man, “but my word is as good as yours notwithstanding. If you can manage to climb the precipice, I shall give you up the maiden ; and though the road is somewhat rough, the prize will more than recompense your labour. About it, therefore, and good luck attend you on your journey.”

Having uttered these words, the dwarf disappeared, with loud bursts of laughter, to the great indignation of Ruthelm, whose wit was altogether in his elbows. He measured

the cliff with angry eyes, and at last exclaimed,—“Climb it, quotha!⁶ yes indeed, if I had wings.”

“It may happen without wings,” said a voice close beside him ; and the knight, looking round, perceived a little old woman, who gently tapped him on the shoulder :

“I have heard all that passed just now between you and my brother. He was once offended by Sibö, but the knight has long since paid the penalty of that offence ; and besides the maiden has none of her father’s harshness ; she is beautiful, good, and compassionate to the wants of others ; I am certain, that she would never refuse hospitality, even though it were to a beggar. For my part, I love her as if she were my own child, and have long wished that some noble knight would choose her as his bride. It seems that you have done so ; and my brother has given you his word, a pledge that with us is sacred. Take, therefore, this silver bell ; go with it to the Wisper Valley, where you will find a mine, which has long ceased to be worked, and which you will easily recognise by the beech-tree and the fir that twine their boughs together at its entrance. Go in without fear, and ring the bell thrice, for within lives my younger brother, who will come to you the moment he hears its sound. At the same time the bell will be a token to him that you are sent from me. Request him to make a ladder for you up to the summit of the Redrich ; he will easily accomplish this task before the break of day, and, when done, you may trust to it without the slightest fear of danger.”

Ruthelm did as the old woman had directed ; he set out instantly for the Wisper Valley, where he soon found the mine in question, with the two trees twined together at its opening. Here he paused in something like terror ; it was one of those still nights, when the mind has leisure for apprehension. The moon shone sadly on the wet grass, and not a star was visible. For a moment his cheek was pale, but in the next moment it was red with shame, and he rang the bell with a most defying vehemence, as if to atone for his momentary alarm. At the third sound, a little man arose from the depths of the mine, habited⁷ in grey, and carrying a lamp, in which burnt a pale blue meteor. To the gnome’s question of what did he want, the knight boldly replied by a plain story of his adventure ; and the friendly dwarf, bidding him to be of good cheer, desired that he would visit the Redrich by the break of day ; at the same time he took from his pocket a whistle, which he blew thrice, when the whole valley swarmed with little gnomes, carrying saws and axes, and other instruments of labour. A sign from their leader was enough ; they set off in the direction of the Redrich, when, in a few moments only, it was evident their task had begun by the horrible din⁸ that might be heard even in the Wisper Valley. Highly delighted with this result, the knight bent his way homewards, his heart beating as fast as the hammers of the gnomes, the noise of which accompanied him in his journey, and entertained him in his castle. Nor indeed did Ruthelm desire better music, for besides that the knights of those warlike times were more celebrated for hard blows than for fine ears, every sound of the axe was a step in the ladder, and

⁶ “He says.”

⁷ Dressed.

⁸ Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the word “din” as “a loud continued noise”.

every step in the ladder was a step nearer to Garlinda, with whom he had contrived to be desperately in love, without the superfluity of seeing her.

No sooner had the morning begun to dawn, than he set out for the Redrich, where he found that gnomes had not made all that nightly clatter to no purpose ; a ladder was firmly planted against the rock, and reached to the very top of the mountain. There was a slight throb of fear at his heart, as he mounted the lower steps, but his courage increased in proportion to his advance. In a short time he arrived happily at the summit, precisely as the light of day was breaking in the east, when the first object presented to his eyes was Garlinda, who sweetly slumbered on a bank of flowers. The knight was riveted to the spot, and his heart beat high with pleasure as he gazed on the sleeping beauty ; but when she opened her bright blue eyes, and turned their mild lustre upon him, he almost sunk beneath the gush of ecstasy that thrilled through every vein. In an instant he was at her feet, and poured forth the story of his love, with a vehemence that at once confounded and pleased the object of it. She blushed, and wept, and smiled as she wept, her eyes sparkling through her tears, like the sunbeams shooting through a spring shower.

At this moment they were interrupted by the unexpected appearance of the gnome who had carried off Garlinda ; behind him was his sister, testifying by her smiles how much pleased she was by the happy meeting of the lovers. At first the dwarf frowned angrily at the sight of Ruthelm ; but, when he perceived the ladder, he readily guessed how all had happened, and burst into a sudden fit of laughter, exclaiming,—“ Another trick played me by my good old sister ! I have promised though, and will keep my word. Take that which you have come so far to seek, and be more hospitable than your father. That you may not, however, gain your prize too easily, you shall return by the same way you came ; for our pupil we have a more convenient road, and heaven grant it may prove the road to her happiness.”

Ruthelm willingly descended the ladder, though without some little peril to his own neck, while the gnome and his sister led the maiden by a path that traversed the interior of the mountain, and opened at its foot by a secret outlet. Here they were to part, and the old woman, presenting her with a box formed of petrified palm-wood, and filled with jewels, thus addressed her : “ Take this, my dear child ; it is the dowry that I have so long and often promised you. And do not forget your mountain friends, for in the various evils of the world you are going to visit, a day, perhaps, may come, when you will need their power. You’ll think of this, my child.”—Garlinda thanked the dwarf, and wept in thanking her.

And now Ruthelm conducted the fair one to her father, though not without many a lingering look cast back upon the mountain she had quitted. To describe the old man’s joy would be impossible ; mindful of the past, he immediately gave orders that all who sought the hospitality of his castle should be feasted there with the utmost kindness for the space of eight days ; and Ruthelm received the hand of Garlinda, in recompense of his knightly service. Both lived to the evening of a long and happy life, blest in themselves and no less blest in their posterity.

For many years the ladder still remained attached to the mountain, and was looked upon by the neighbouring peasants as the work of a demon. Hence it is that the Redrich is yet known by the name of “the Devil’s Ladder.”

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 444 Castro Street, Suite 900, Mountain View, California, 94041, USA.



This transcription of “The Devil’s Ladder” by Incihan Hotaman is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).