

GOTHIC BOURNES

THE ENCHANTED KNIGHT;

OR,

PHEBE.

(1801)

TRANSCRIPTION BY
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EDITING GOTHIC TEXTS
ELEVENTH SERIES, 2024
Nº 1

TALES OF WONDER

CONTAINING

The Castle of Enchantment or
The Mysterious Deception.
The Robbers Daughter or
The Phantom of the Grotto.
The Magic-Legacy &c

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Blue Spirits and Grey.

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THE ENCHANTED KNIGHT; OR, PHEBE.¹

There was a man who was left a widower with one child, a sweet girl, whose name was Phebe. After he had lived two or three years single, he determined to marry again; and he was the more easily induced so to do, because he had met with a woman about his own age, and very much of his own disposition, to whom he had made himself agreeable. This woman was a widow, and, like him, had a daughter called Martha, who was two years older than Phebe; they mutually promised to be exceedingly good and tender to each other's offspring; and at first they kept their promises tolerably well.

[47] It happened that the father died, when Phebe was about twelve years old; and as she had been well instructed by her father's care, who loved her dearly, she was, on account of the readiness of her wit, more accomplished and advanced in knowledge than many of twice her age, and much more so than her sister Martha, though there had been equal care taken of them both. The death of her father was a great misfortune to Phebe; she soon began to find an alteration in the behaviour of her mother and sister. The latter, having now no restraint upon her, (for her mother had always been far too indulgent) took every opportunity of thwarting Phebe, of whom she became exceedingly jealous, owing to the preference Phebe always obtained² in society.

It may easily be imagined that poor Phebe soon became deprived of all the little pleasures in which she used to share: instead of mixing with the visitors, and going abroad with her sister, as formerly, she was confined to her needle, and ordered to assist the servant at the lowest drudgery.

The praises that Phebe had obtained, and the admiration with which every body³ was struck who happened to get a sight of her, served only farther to inflame the enmity of those to whom alone she could look for protection; insomuch, that she at last was not only the drudge of the family, but was stinted in her very food, obliged to eat the offals, and beat upon the most frivolous pretences, till she was sometimes hardly able to move.

One day, when the mother and favourite daughter were gone out, and had, as usual, locked up every thing from her, leaving her but a scanty pittance, scarce half enough to satisfy nature, a poor old woman, tottering under age, came to the door, begging she would give her a morsel to keep her from starving. Phebe, though very hungry herself, had too good a heart to see such an old creature ready to sink with age and hunger, and not give her every assistance in her power. She immediately went to the door, gave

¹ This tale is contained in *Tales of Wonder* (pp. 46-50) dated from 1801 (therefore, it belongs to The Long Eighteen Century) by an unknown author. The tale has been transcribed fully respecting the punctuation, spelling, and syntax of the original with the exception of the 'long s', and a few ligatures connecting 'c' and 't', all of which have been modernised. Other idiosyncratic spellings have only been marked through the use of [sic], and all the archaisms found have been listed in a final note.

² In the original text this word is partially erased.

³ In the original text this word is partially erased.

the poor woman her hand, desired her to come in and rest herself, and set about warming what little morsel she had, (which she herself was going to have eat cold) to make it as comfortable as she could. She then laid a clean napkin and plate, and waited upon and cherished her as though she had been her own mother. “The God of Heaven bless thee” said the old woman, as Phebe stood ministering by her side; “thou art merciful and a gracious angel, and shalt lose nothing by thy charity. Thou hast given me food, wilt thou give me a kiss?” Phebe would always rather hurt her own feelings than the feelings of another: and though the old woman was very disagreeable with rags and age, she instantly kissed her with the best grace imaginable, lest she should give her pain, or lest she should be thought to despise age and poverty. The old woman fixed her eyes stedfastly [sic] upon her—“Sweet and heavenly creature,” said she, “have I at last found such a one! Yes; if thy courage equals thy other virtues, thou art the treasure I so long and ineffectually have sought.” —Phebe wondered to hear a miserable old woman speak in this manner, and in such language too. “Thou art very young; art thou of a timid disposition?— “No, indeed,” said Phebe, “I never injure [48] any creature that has life or sensibility. I would do good to every body if I had the power, and I hope I commit no wickedness, then wherefore should I be afraid?”

Phebe turned her eyes towards her guest, and instead of a poor, decrepid [sic], and beggarly old woman, she beheld a beauteous Being in robes of white and scarlet, and wings more variously spotted than the shining plumage of the Chinese pheasant!⁴

“Purest and best of earthly virgins,” said the bright vision, “be not alarmed.” — “No,” replied Phebe, “I am only surprised. If you are a heavenly being, you will not injure me; if a wicked one, you cannot, till I, by guilt, shall give you power over me.” — “Listen to me,” said the spirit: “Long have I been seeking to deliver Oron, the knight of a neighbouring castle, from the authority of the demons; but in vain: they have seduced and enchanted him, and he is held a willing slave to five of the most powerful that the dark entrails of the sulphurous regions can emit. He hath suffered them to light up the Dead Hand⁵ within his walls, which hath stupefied and lulled to sleep the guardian spirits fate had appointed to protect him from their machinations; and till that is extinguished, never shall he be freed from their wicked dominion. The Sylphs⁶ and other aetherial essences have in vain made war upon these demons and their adherents; a young virgin alone can vanquish them, and extinguish the enchanted flame of the Dead or Glorious Hand; for a good and beauteous virgin is of more power than a host of spirits. I and my companions have long mourned over the misfortunes of Oron; for till these infernal and malicions [sic] fiends had fascinated him, the earth had few young men so promising. To thee, then, fair and excellent creature, is this charitable and noble task assigned.”

⁴ A large, long-tailed gamebird.

⁵ Refers to the “Hand of Glory”, a legend from European folklore. Said to be the mummified hand of a man who has been hanged; if made to hold a candle, it will prevent a person from awakening until the candle is extinguished. For further information, refer to Ashliman, D. L. “The Hand of Glory and Other Legends about Human Hands”. *University of Pittsburgh Site*, Revised 2019, <https://sites.pitt.edu/~dash/hand.html>.

⁶ A term for minor spirits, elementals, or fairies of the air.

“I hope I have the will, if I have the ability, to do good,” replied Phebe; “nor am I afraid of encountering such danger, as a weak creature, like me, may support; but I am dependent on the will of another. I must not leave my mother’s house without her knowledge; for that would be wickedness, and not virtue.”

Phebe had scarcely pronounced the last word, when she heard her mother and sister at the door; and, instead of a sylph, saw the same old woman again at her side whom her charity had so lately relieved. She knew not what to think; she was ready to imagine she had been in a dream: she ran, however, to open the door for her mother.— “Hey-day! Indeed!⁷ said the sister, “what old beldam have you got here to keep you company? I suppose you have been having your fortune told, but I am afraid it is not very good.” – “Better than thine will ever be, Calot,” answered the old woman, and glided out of the house. There needed not half this to set them upon the patient suffering Phebe: they both fell upon her, and, as they thought, beat her most unmercifully; but, to the astonishment of Phebe, their blows gave her no pain. They were not satisfied with this: her sister insisted upon it that she should be instantly turned out of doors, and the foolish and cruel mother put her wicked wishes in execution.

Phebe could not forbear weeping, at finding herself, thus friend[49]less and unknown, driven from her mother’s house; she was even exceedingly affected with the thought of parting from persons who had treated her so basely. She comforted herself, however, as well as she could. “I am very able and willing to work,” thought she, “and surely some charitable good person will give me a little food for my labour.”

She wandered along the path she first took, without knowing whither it led, till evening began to come on, and she was faint with hunger, when, being come to an eminence, she sat herself down, and turned round to take a last look at the inhospitable, yet respected mansion, from which she was expelled. As she looked down the lawn, she saw, with surprise, her favourite cat, to which she had always been very kind, coming trotting after her, and looking up, as if in pity for her fate. The cat seemed to be guided by a superior instinct: there were three paths led from where her mistress sat, and she took one of them, and looked back as if inviting Phebe to follow; which action she repeated several times. Phebe, to whom no path had a peculiar preference, inclined to that from the action of the animal. The cat had not gone far, before she turned a little from the way to a bush, and stopped, then went back to meet her mistress, and returned to the same spot: this incited Phebe’s curiosity, and she followed to the bush. Here she found a clean white napkin, and in it a part of a very fine capon, with some good wheaten bread.⁸ Phebe’s feelings may easily be imagined; she sat herself upon the bank, and divided her treasure with her friend.

She presently rose from her repast, and her cat still ran before, as if to conduct her. They came presently to a place where the stile had been hedged up, to prevent passengers from coming any more that road; the cat turned down the side of the hedge,

⁷ In the original text the inverted commas are omitted.

⁸ A Brown soda bread originally from Northern Ireland.

and found a clear gap.— Darkness now grew on apace, and there was neither town, hamlet, nor house, in view; yet poor Phebe kept implicitly following her wary guide. On each hand were deep pits, bogs, and precipices, into which the smallest deviation would for ever plunge her; but her faithful cat kept just before; and every moment kept turning its luminous eyes, as if to light and guide its mistress, suddenly tumbled down a precipice, and, by its cries, gave Phebe, whose feet were upon the very brink, warning of her danger, and its own apparent destruction.

While she stood thus motionless, and looking down the abyss into which her guide had fallen, she beheld an apparition rise slowly from the bottom, holding a lighted torch in its right hand, for it had but one. Its visage was of a death-like pale and piteous; it held up the remains of its left-arm, as if to implore redress and brandishing its torch to make it shed a brighter light; it glided by, and stood at some little distance. Phebe beheld the spectre with terror, yet with that resolution which virtue alone can give.

Her dreadful guide conducted her safely over the moor, till they came to a gothic castle, surrounded by a moat. The draw-bridge was up, and the spectre made a sudden stop, as a signal for Phebe to proceed no farther yet; it then skimmed across the canal, and [50] strait the massy hinges began to creak, and the bridge descended with a weighty and loud crash that echoed through the stillness of the night, and made the old vaulted castle reverbrate [sic] horror.

Phebe was now in total darkness, and courage and virtue began to shudder at the remembrance of her situation. However, she summoned up her strength, and with heroic fortitude ascended a narrow stair-case. She went up so many steps, and kept so continually winding that at last, with giddiness and want of breath, she was obliged [sic] to rest. She had scarcely stopped a moment, before she heard the clinking of chains, and the footsteps of one descending, who sent forth at intervals, the most painful and dismal groans. Her hair now stood an [sic] end, her blood ran cold, and her heart sunk within her: it was impossible for any one to pass, and the least opposing body would precipitate her to the bottom. The groans and the clanking increased; they seemed not three steps distant, and her faculties were frozen with horror, when the place was instantaneously illumined, and she beheld the beautiful Sylph sustaining a dreadful combat with a monstrous demon, by which it seemed to be almost overpowered. A voice at the same time cried aloud— ‘Go forward! You only are in danger when you do not proceed.’⁹ Phebe again called up her resolution, began to ascend, and again was left in silence and total darkness.

She came at length to a little door, which opened with a gentle push: through this she went, and found herself upon the great staircase, opposite to a suit of magnificent apartments, illuminated with large wax tapers; these she boldly entered, passed through several, and found each succeeding one superior to the last, till she arrived in the grand saloon. Here, in the centre, she beheld, upon a superb couch, Oron, the enchanted knight, lying entranced: over him hung suspended in the air the Glorious Hand; that is

⁹ In the original text the inverted commas are omitted.

to say, a dead man's hand prepared by Necromancy,¹⁰ dipt in magical oil, and each finger lighted up.

The Glorious Hand burnt dim as she drew near; the colour revived in the cheeks of Oron, her virgin breath purified the air. The Hand gradually descended; it's [sic] faint light burnt blue, and scarce cast a gleam; and, when opposite to her coral lips, Phebe breathed upon it, the flame became totally extinct, and the knight rose from his enchanted couch.

Phebe's virtues now met a full reward, if any earthly blessing could be a reward for such patience, meekness, and magnanimity. She became the lady of the castle, the adored wife of Oron, the wonder of the country, and the ornament and pride of her sex. Her mother and sister would have humbled themselves at her feet; but she taught them to be virtuous, and took them to her bosom: and thus she convinced the world, that a perseverance in goodness must at last conduct to happiness.

FINIS.

London: Printed by J. Bonsor, Salisbury Square

Editor's note:

This tale contains a number of archaisms: the old forms of the second person pronoun ("thou", "thee", "thine"), the special second and third person singular endings of present and past tenses "shalt" ("shall"), "hast" and "hath" ("have"), "art" ("are"), "wilt" ("will"). Other distinctive spellings include "aetherial" ("ethereal"), "dipt" (past tense of "dip"). Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century authors often relied on this technique of using archaic words aiming to evoke a historical past that was obscure and mysteriously alluring.

The tale displays a narrative structure commonly found in wonder tales, as well as some archetype proper of this traditional genre, specifically, the Cinderella motif.

¹⁰ The practice of sorcery or black magic in general.