

THE PRINCESS AND THE GOBLIN

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The princess and the goblin by George MacDonald

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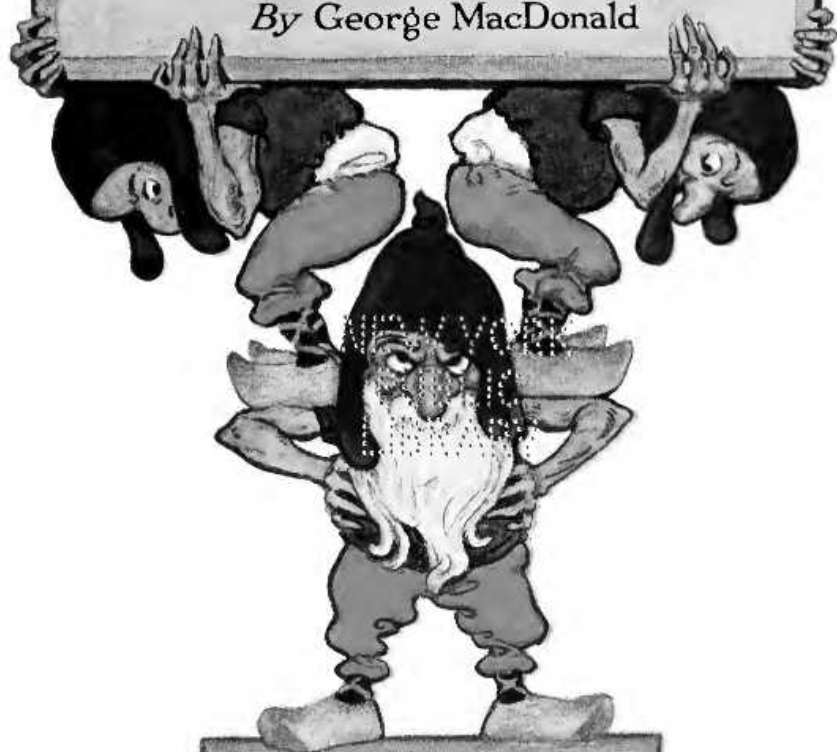
GEORGE MACDONALD

**THE PRINCESS
AND THE GOBLIN**

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By George MacDonald



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ILLUSTRATIONS

	FACING PAGE
She ran for some distance, turned several times, and then began to be afraid.....	14
She clapped her hands with delight, and up rose such a flapping of wings.....	22
"Never mind, Princess Irene," he said. "You mustn't kiss me to-night. But you sha'n't break your word. I will come another time".....	42
In an instant she was on the saddle, and clasped in his great strong arms.....	68
"Come," and she still held out her arms.....	96
The goblins fell back a little when he began, and made horrible grimaces all through the rhyme.....	118
Curdie went on after her, flashing his torch about.....	138
There sat his mother by the fire, and in her arms lay the princess fast asleep.....	184

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. WHY THE PRINCESS HAS A STORY ABOUT HER	9
II. THE PRINCESS LOSES HERSELF	13
III. THE PRINCESS AND—WE SHALL SEE WHO	16
IV. WHAT THE NURSE THOUGHT OF IT	24
V. THE PRINCESS LETS WELL ALONE	29
VI. THE LITTLE MINER	32
VII. THE MINES	45
VIII. THE GOBLINS	50
IX. THE HALL OF THE GOBLIN PALACE	59
X. THE PRINCESS'S KING-PAPA	68
XI. THE OLD LADY'S BEDROOM	73
XII. A SHORT CHAPTER ABOUT CURDIE	82
XIII. THE COBS' CREATURES	85
XIV. THAT NIGHT WEEK	90
XV. WOVEN AND THEN SPUN	95
XVI. THE RING	106
XVII. SPRING-TIME	109
XVIII. CURDIE'S CLUE	112
XIX. GOBLIN COUNSELS	122
XX. IRENE'S CLUE	128
XXI. THE ESCAPE	134
XXII. THE OLD LADY AND CURDIE	147
XXIII. CURDIE AND HIS MOTHER	155
XXIV. IRENE BEHAVES LIKE A PRINCESS	165
XXV. CURDIE COMES TO GRIEF	168
XXVI. THE GOBLIN-MINERS	174
XXVII. THE GOBLINS IN THE KING'S HOUSE	177
XXVIII. CURDIE'S GUIDE	184
XXIX. MASON-WORK	189
XXX. THE KING AND THE KISS	192
XXXI. THE SUBTERRANEAN WATERS	196
XXXII. THE LAST CHAPTER	202

THE PRINCESS AND THE GOBLIN

CHAPTER I

WHY THE PRINCESS HAS A STORY ABOUT HER

THERE was once a little princess who—
“*But, Mr. Author, why do you always write about princesses?*”

“*Because every little girl is a princess.*”

“*You will make them vain if you tell them that.*”

“*Not if they understand what I mean.*”

“*Then what do you mean?*”

“*What do you mean by a princess?*”

“*The daughter of a king.*”

“*Very well, then every little girl is a princess, and there would be no need to say anything about it, except that she is always in danger of forgetting her rank, and behaving as if she had grown out of the mud. I have seen little princesses behave like the children of thieves and lying beggars, and that is why they need to be told they are princesses. And that is why, when I tell a story of this kind, I like to tell it about a princess. Then I can say better what I mean, because I can then give her every beautiful thing I want her to have.*”

“*Please go on.*”

There was once a little princess whose father was king over a great country full of mountains and valleys. His palace

THE PRINCESS AND THE GOBLIN

was built upon one of the mountains, and was very grand and beautiful. The princess, whose name was Irene, was born there, but she was sent soon after her birth, because her mother was not very strong, to be brought up by country people in a large house, half castle, half farm-house, on the side of another mountain, about halfway between its base and its peak.

The princess was a sweet little creature, and at the time my story begins was about eight years old, I think, but she got older very fast. Her face was fair and pretty, with eyes like two bits of night-sky, each with a star dissolved in the blue. Those eyes you would have thought must have known they came from there, so often were they turned up in that direction. The ceiling of her nursery was blue, with stars in it, as like the sky as they could make it. But I doubt if ever she saw the real sky with the stars in it, for a reason which I had better mention at once.

These mountains were full of hollow places underneath; huge caverns, and winding ways, some with water running through them, and some shining with all colors of the rainbow when a light was taken in. There would not have been much known about them, had there not been mines there, great deep pits, with long galleries and passages running off from them, which had been dug to get at the ore of which the mountains were full. In the course of digging, the miners came upon many of these natural caverns. A few of them had far-off openings out on the side of a mountain, or into a ravine.

Now in these subterranean caverns lived a strange race of beings, called by some gnomes, by some kobolds, by some goblins. There was a legend current in the country that at

WHY THE PRINCESS HAS A STORY ABOUT HER

one time they lived above ground, and were very like other people. But for some reason or other, concerning which there were different legendary theories, the king had laid what they thought too severe taxes upon them, or had required observances of them they did not like, or had begun to treat them with more severity in some way or other, and impose stricter laws; and the consequence was that they had all disappeared from the face of the country. According to the legend, however, instead of going to some other country, they had all taken refuge in the subterranean caverns, whence they never came out but at night, and then seldom showed themselves in any numbers, and never to many people at once. It was only in the least frequented and most difficult parts of the mountains that they were said to gather even at night in the open air. Those who had caught sight of any of them said that they had greatly altered in the course of generations; and no wonder, seeing they lived away from the sun, in cold and wet and dark places. They were now, not ordinarily ugly, but either absolutely hideous, or ludicrously grotesque both in face and form. There was no invention, they said, of the most lawless imagination expressed by pen or pencil, that could surpass the extravagance of their appearance. And as they grew mis-shapen in body, they had grown in knowledge and cleverness, and now were able to do things no mortal could see the possibility of. But as they grew in cunning, they grew in mischief, and their great delight was in every way they could think of to annoy the people who lived in the open-air-story above them. They had enough of affection left for each other, to preserve them from being