

Every nation has its fairy-tales, many of which are very ancient, and have come down from the old days when people really believed in the existence and powers of fairies, and other supernatural beings.

Some of the most beautiful fairy-tales come from ancient Greece, like those of Theseus and the Minotaur, Perseus and Andromeda, Pandora's Box, Jason and the Golden Fleece, and many other famous ones. The old German stories were collected into a book by a scholar called Grimm, and are known as Grimm's "Fairy Tales".

England has many, and India is specially rich in them; and "The Arabian Nights" is a famous collection of old Eastern tales of magic and mystery.

Some of these stories are not only very old, but are found with slight differences in many different nations and languages; for example, the story of Cinderella and the Glass Slipper, Blue Beard and his Wives, and the Sleeping Beauty.

Scholars think that such stories go back to the time when the Aryans were one united people, before they split up into different nations, some of which occupied Europe, and some went east and settled in Persia and India.

Besides these old stories of ancient folklore, many beautiful fairy-tales have been written in modern times by writers of genius, like Hans Andersen in Germany, and Charles Kingsley, James Barrie and Walter de la Mare in England — whose stories are read with delight, not only by children, but also by grown-up people.

Of course no one nowadays believes in fairies, except ignorant and superstitious villagers, and, perhaps, children. And yet even authors of genius still write fairy-tales, and people still read them with pleasure. Children still love fairy stories, and their mothers still think it is a good thing to tell them. Why is this?

Well, we live in a very practical and matter-of-fact age, and our daily drudgery and our monotonous lives cannot satisfy the craving for romance that is more or less in all human beings. So we seek for romance in fiction; and grown-up people read novels, and children love to hear fairy-tales.

Though we know the novels are fiction, and even children no longer really believe in fairies, we still find pleasure in such tales, because they take us away for a little time from our dull, everyday life.

Moreover, fairy-tales are good for children, because they express and keep alive the sense of wonder, which is a very valuable possession for adults as well as children. The universe is full of mystery, and life is a mystery.

Modern science has not cleared that mystery up, and the oldest and wisest men cannot explain human life. But people who get a little knowledge, think they can explain everything, and pretend to wonder at nothing. In reality, wonder is the beginning of all knowledge; and when we cease to wonder, we cease to learn.