

INTRODUCTION.

Folk lore, legends, myths and fairy tales have followed childhood through the ages, for every healthy youngster has a wholesome and instinctive love for stories fantastic, marvelous and manifestly unreal. The winged fairies of Grimm and Andersen have brought more happiness to childish hearts than all other human creations.

Yet the old-time fairy tale, having served for generations, may now be classed as "historical" in the children's library; for the time has come for a series of newer "wonder tales" in which the stereotyped genie, dwarf and fairy are eliminated, together with all the horrible and blood-curdling incident devised by their authors to point a fearsome moral to each tale. Modern education includes morality; therefore the modern child seeks only entertainment in its wonder-tales and gladly dispenses with all disagreeable incident.

Having this thought in mind, the story of "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz" was written solely to please children of today. It aspires to being a modernized fairy tale, in which the wonderment and joy are retained and the heart-aches and nightmares are left out.

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Modern Fairy Tales

• by L. Frank Baum •

The earliest literature of which we have knowledge is that of fairy lore, and the fairy tale has survived through all the changing ages to this day, and is still as popular with childish minds as in the beginning. Yet it has necessarily undergone considerable evolution, and the modern fairy tale differs materially from the folk tales of the ancients.

It is only experience in life and contact with the world that changes the childish viewpoint to the adult viewpoint. When the world was young, and life's experiences were few, men and women had simple minds and craved the same class of wonder tales that childhood has always loved. They were then told by professional story-tellers, and sung by wandering minstrels, and the folk tales—the legends and romances handed down from age to age by word of mouth—teemed with relations of fairy elves who assisted mankind in time of need; for it is to be remarked that even the oldest known fairy legends carried their morals, and never has a fairy tale lived, if one has been told or written, wherein the good did not conquer the evil and virtue finally reign supreme. Indeed, the editors of the first printed books of fairy tales took especial pains to place a moral at the end of each story, so that if by chance the reader carelessly missed it in the narration it would stare him in the face before he could finally escape. So that the fairies were originally intended, and are today, to be the benefactors of mankind, and the acquaintance of our children with them can lead to no harm at all.

I once asked a little fellow, a friend of mine, to tell me what a "fairy" is. He replied, quite promptly: "A fairy has wings, and is much like an angel, only smaller." Now that, I believe, is the general conception of fairies; and it is a pretty conception, is it not? Yet we know the family of immortals generally termed "fairies" has many branches and includes fays, sprites, elves, nymphs, ryls, knooks, gnomes, brownies and many other subdivisions.

There is no blue book or history of the imaginative little creatures to guide us in classifying them, but they all have their uses and peculiar characteristics; as, for example, the little ryls, who carry around paint-pots, with which they color, most brilliantly and artistically, the blossoms of the flowers.

No one knows who invented fairies. The earliest record of intelligent man shows him conversant with fairy lore. Perhaps a dim realization

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that a beneficent guiding power directs our mortal footsteps first led to the conception of fairies. Anyway, they were one of the first fruits of human imagination, and the idea of the quaint, merry helpful, and sometimes mischievous, little immortals proved so fascinating that it has never for a day been forgotten since the world has had a history.

Nor is the authorship of the oldest and most popular fairy tales known. They belong to legendary folk lore of nations, and no man can claim them for his own. It was once declared that Charles Perrault, a Frenchman who lived in the seventeenth century, wrote the first authentic fairy tales, but this has since been disproved. "The Sleeping Beauty," "Cinderella," and "Little Red Riding-Hood" are found to be folk tales of various nations, differing but slightly in form in each instance; so that Perrault must be classed with the Brothers Grimm, and later with Andrew Lang, as a collector and editor of the fairy literature prevalent in his time. Doubtless Perrault, the Grimms, and Lang deserve undying fame for having thus rescued so many beautiful stories from threatened oblivion, for it has been impossible for modern authors to equal the charming imagery of those ancient tales.

The first known creator of fairy tales, and perhaps the best known of all who have since followed him, is Hans Christian Andersen, the immortal friend of the childhood days of our grandparents. This great Dane had not only a marvelous imagination but he was a poet as well, and surrounded his tales with some of the most beautiful descriptive passages known to our literature. As children you skipped those passages—I can guess that, because as a child I skipped them myself—but as women you ought to read Andersen again, that you may revel in the beauties of his splendid descriptions, and enjoy the fascination of his poetry. Andersen wrote but one book of short fairy tales, yet that book will live forever, and all else that he wrote—and he wrote many books—is long since forgotten.

Singularly enough, we have no recognized author of fairy literature between Andersen's day and that of Lewis Carroll, the quaint and clever old clergyman who recorded *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Carroll's method of handling fairies was as whimsical as Andersen's was reverential, yet it is but fair to state that the children loved Alice better than any prince or princess that Andersen ever created. The secret of Alice's success lay in the fact that she was a real child, and any normal child could sympathize with her all through her adventures. The story may often bewilder the little one—for it is bound to bewilder us, having neither plot nor motive in its relation—but Alice is doing something every moment, and doing something strange and marvelous, too; so the child follows her with rapturous delight. It is said that Dr. Dodgson, the

author, was so ashamed of having written a child's book that he would only allow it to be published under the pen name of Lewis Carroll, but it made him famous, even then, and *Alice in Wonderland*, rambling and incoherent as it is, is one of the best and perhaps the most famous of all modern fairy tales.

Frank Stockton once wrote a most bewitching story of the good class called "The Floating Prince," and Howard Pyle's dragon stories are unsurpassed in drollery and imaginative power. Another famous book is by Tudor Jenks, and is called *Imaginations*. Then there are Albert Stearns' entertaining story books, and the clever stories of the English author, E. Nesbit. Just recently Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett has written some little books of fairy tales that are all about children and the things children love. I do not wholly approve Miss Mulock's famous story of *The Little Lame Prince*, for although it is charmingly written, it is too pitiful in sentiment. Doubtless many crippled children have derived a degree of comfort from the adventures of the little lame prince and his magic cloak; but a normal child should not be harassed with pitiful subjects, and even the maimed ones prefer to idolize the well and strong.

Yes, there are many books to be had of the right sort, books that will entertain and delight your little ones without putting a single bad or repulsive idea into their heads. So I entreat parents, and those who present books to children, to be particular in selecting modern, up-to-date fairy tales, for in this way you will feed the imaginative instinct of the little ones and develop the best side of child nature. Glance into the book yourself, and see that the story is not marred by murders or cruelties, by terrifying characters, or by mawkish sentimentality, love and marriage. Because some fairy tales have these faults it would be folly to withhold all fairy tales from children. You do not ostracize all novels because you know some of them are vicious. Life at any period is robbed of half its pleasure if good books do not enter into it.

The child skips descriptive passages because it cannot understand or appreciate them, and such writers as Andersen, with all their kindly sympathy for the little ones, forget that their own keen appreciation of the beauties of nature is not yet shared by their youthful and inexperienced readers. Some years ago good old Dr. Skinner, pastor of the Mercer Street Church, in New York, made a ponderous attempt to do his duty by the lambs of his flock by preaching a special sermon to children every month. "My children," said he, on one of those painful occasions, "I propose to give you this morning an epitome of the life of St. Paul. Perhaps some of you, my children, do not know what the word 'epitome' means. Now 'epitome,' my children, is in its signification synonymous with synopsis."

It is folly to place before the little ones a class of literature they cannot comprehend and which is sure to bore them and to destroy their pleasure in reading. What they want is action—"something doing every minute"—exciting adventures, unexpected difficulties to be overcome, and marvelous escapes.

To my mind a good book of this sort is just as necessary to the proper promotion of a child's welfare as baths, exercise, or wholesome food. There is no danger of deceiving the little one, or giving it a false impression of life. The children know very well that fairies and fairylands are apart from human life, even if they believe for a time that such things really exist. The myth concerning Santa Claus deceives few modern children, but delights them all, and so it is with the fairies. Childhood loves the vivid interest of fairy tales and the glamor of fairyland just as we adults love the play and the glamor of the stage, and there is no particle of harm in the entertainment thus afforded them if proper care is taken in the selection of their books.

The Wizard of OZ

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EDITOR



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