

THE PERMANENT REALITY.—By ALGERNON BLACKWOOD.

"Oh! fairy-tale, fashioned by the wayward desires of men who are in captivity to life and who cannot be reconciled to their captivity—sweet fairy-tale, where art thou!"

THE Russian lawyer in Sologrub's story who uttered the cry believed himself bored and afflicted by circumstances. "He looked on life rather pessimistically, and captivated young ladies by the eloquent pallor of his face and by the sarcastic utterances which he gave forth on every possible occasion." One evening, however, when his gloom was deepest, he went for a walk along the stream at sunset and met the entrancing beauty of Nature face to face—and was touched wonderfully into a consciousness of bigger life. "It looked as if one need only step into it to be at once filled with the joy of simple happiness. . . . He accepted the beauty, he lost his lesser troubled self. "If only a fairy-tale could come into one's life," he cried, "and for a time upset the ordered arrangement of predetermined fate! Oh, for the fairy-tale, for a few enchanted years, a few days. . . .!"

It is a significant and exquisite story, a re-statement of a truth as old as life, one that can never die though it may be neglected and forgotten in the strenuous rush of modern life. To-day it is coming back, strangely enough, into its own. The collapse on so vast a scale in the external world of things we have hitherto deemed real and leaned upon is sending our hearts and minds in search of a more permanent reality—beauty and love and goodness which material forces cannot shatter. The fairy-tale in Sologrub's sense, in the true sense

of the word, sings ever the triumph of good over evil; it breathes comfort, faith, and beauty. But it sings more than this, for at the heart of it lies belief in one's self, belief in one's own infinite possibilities.

This conversation between two literary men was heard the other day: "What war books are you reading just now?" "I'm not reading any." "What are you reading, then? What do you read at night, for instance?" And the reply was "Fairy-tales. I find their beauty and simplicity and happiness full of solace. Try them. They keep you sane!"

But the speaker meant not only Andersen. There's many a modern book that has the genuine fairy-tale magic without being labelled as such. The poetic imagination casts the fairy spell that so many need just now as anodyne and antidote against the grisly Teuton wickedness that seems to love evil for its own sake. There's many a man in the trenches who has written home to ask for a book of fairy-tales or fanciful imaginative beauty. He wants to remind himself that beauty, love, and goodness still live in the hearts of men and women. It is an encouraging yet not a surprising fact. There is no better present.

For the spell of fairy loveliness rises on all sides now against the effort to destroy it from the world. The fairy-tale flatters in us the sense of

eternity, and of undying things. It awakens belief in our own magical powers, and tells us—that many already know but some forget—that we are greater than we know. Anything may happen to us, and anything come true; we are all princesses, heroes; space and time as we read lie open to our faith; the world is ours.

The true fairy-tale lifts us into the ideal region where "everything possible to be believed is an image of truth"; it is an affirmation of our essential deity; it confirms and underlines in each of us the feeling: "I'm wonderful, too—somewhere, if only I could find the way and live it!" The endurance of the Little Mermaid in Andersen's tale, that held out to the end though her heart was breaking; is being lived by hundreds at this very moment; the faith and courage of the girl who believed through the long silence that her eleven brothers would change back from swans and rescue her at last—that faith, that courage is comforting to read about, because it is evident now in every hour of every single day. . . . The child, of course, needs no such affirmation. It knows it is wonderful. It is the grown-ups who forget. . . . Let them now remember again; let them take a full dose of fairy wonder and fairy beauty and fairy belief, and so find a brave, glad confidence—in themselves and in life, too.