

"A PRISONER IN FAIRYLAND"

In *A Prisoner in Fairyland*, by Algernon Blackwood, we have a curious, unusual, puzzling type of book, over which it behooves the reviewer to exercise a certain degree of discretion. The underlying idea, the keynote, as it were, is the transference of thought and the duty of every living soul to strive to think nothing but beautiful thoughts, because in that way we may spread beauty and happiness throughout the whole world. More specifically, it is the story of the awakening of a London financier who, after long years spent in the amassing of a fortune, reverts to his early dream of becoming a great philanthropist. His awakening dates from a certain day when he revisits the scene of his childhood and, left alone at twilight in the old playground of his youth, relives the old fantastic nonsense so serious and so real to childhood,—the old, almost forgotten game of the Starlight Express for Fairyland,—and as he stands there day-dreaming, all the old fantastic, illogical creations of his childhood's imagination come trooping around him in the dusk, so real as to be almost tangible, indeed, for the time being, more real than the actualities of his prosaic, every-day business life. He sees again the Gypsy, the Creature of the Gravel-Pit, the enormous Woman of the Hay-stack, the Laugher, the Head Gardener, the Blue-Eyed Guard. He sees the Net of Stars being fastened into place, and he remembers the old Star Cave, "the cave where lost starlight is stored up for future use."

He just had time to seize the little hand the Guard held out, and to drop into a seat beside her, when the train began to move. It rose soundlessly with lightning speed. It shot up to a tremendous height, then paused, hovering in the night.

The Guard turned her big blue eyes upon him.

"Where to?" she whispered. And he suddenly remembered that it was always he who decided the destination, and that this time he was at a loss what to say.

"The Star Cave, of course," he cried, "the cave where the lost starlight gathers."

... "Which direction?" she asked. ... "Name please, but quickly. The Interfering Sun, you know—there's no time to lose. We shall be meeting the Morning Spiders soon."

The Morning Spiders! How it all came back! The Morning Spiders that fly over the fields in the dawn upon their private threads of gossamer and fairy cotton.

He remembered that, as children, they had never actually found this Star Cave, for the Interfering Sun had always come too soon, and spoiled it all.

This will suffice to convey some idea of the strange, almost uncanny flavour of this most unusual book. It is one about which there can be no general consensus of opinion: to some readers it must remain a tissue of absurdities, an idle rigmarole of mad words; to others, it will come as a sort of fairy cloth-o'-gold, a beautiful shimmering vision of lost illusions of youth. And each class of readers will be equally right; because what is partly true of all books is superlatively true of this particular one: that the best of it lies not in what the author has put into it, but in what each individual reader can bring to it and read out of it. And to those readers to whom the romance of childhood has become a sealed book, *A Prisoner in Fairyland* necessarily has no message.