

CONCERNING FAIRY TALES

offer one a clue to the experience that is sure to follow. Not that my childhood was so bitter, unless for childhood loneliness is bitterness, and without doubt it is the worst thing that can happen to one's childhood. Mine was merely a different childhood, and in this sense an original one. I was left with myself to discover myself amid the multitudinous other and far greater mysteries. I was never the victim of fear of goblins and ghosts because I was never taught them. I was merely taught by nature to follow, as if led by a rare and tender hand, the then almost unendurable beauty that lay on every side of me. It was pain then, to follow beauty, because I didn't understand beauty; it must always, I think, be distressing to follow anything one does not understand.

I used to go, in my earliest school days, into a little strip of woodland not far from the great ominous red brick building in a small manufacturing town, on the edge of a wonderful great river in Maine, from which cool and quiet spot I could always hear the dominant clang of the bell, and there I could listen with all my very boyish simplicity to the running of the water over the stones, and watch—for it was spring, of course—the new leaves pushing up out of the mould, and see the light-hued blossoms swinging on the new breeze. I cared more for these in themselves than I did for any legendary presences sitting under them, shaking imperceptible fingers and waving invisible wands