

**A GIFT FROM  
FAIRY LAND**

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A gift from fairy land by James Kirke Paulding

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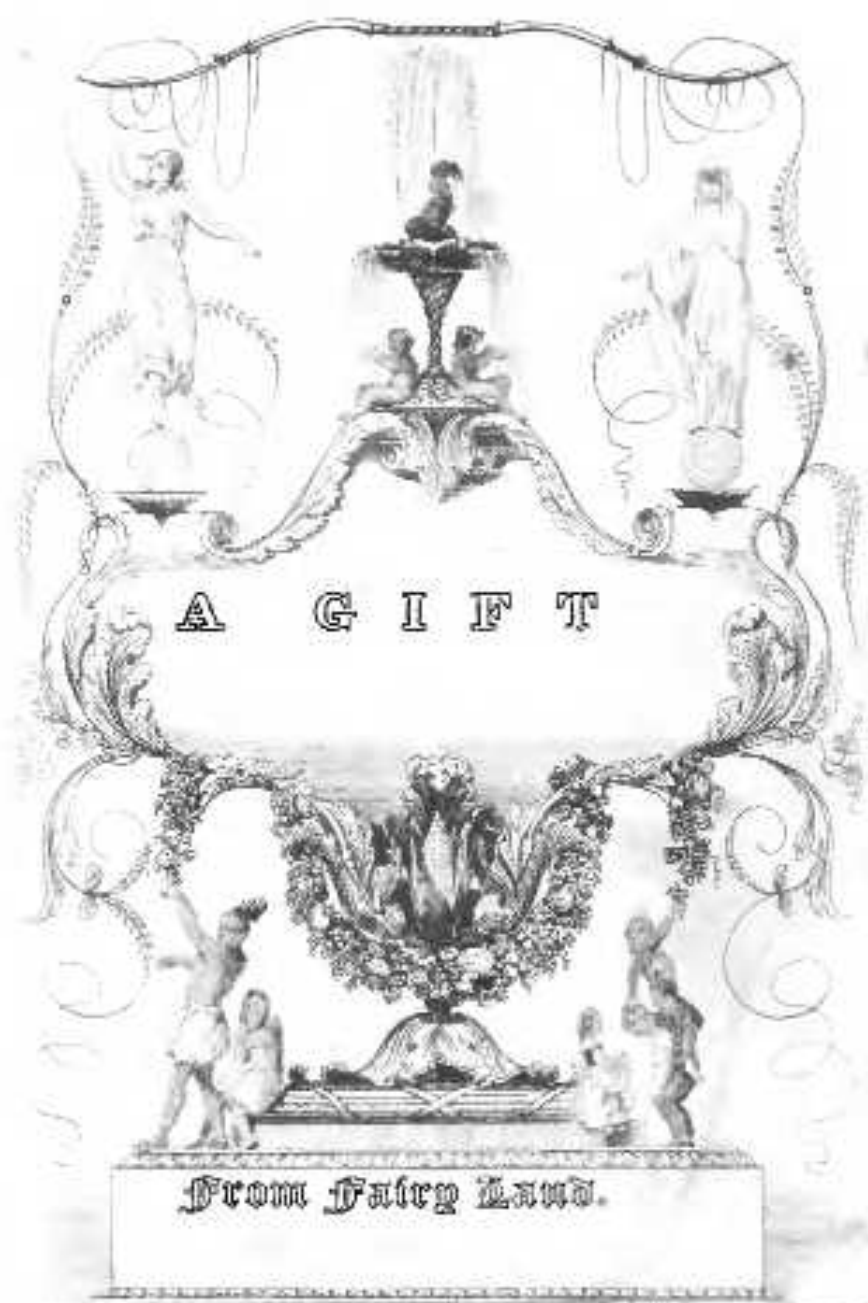
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**JAMES KIRKE PAULDING**

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A G I F T

From Fairy Land.



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F A I R Y L A N D .

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If the old maxim, that "seeing is believing," had not become in a great measure obsolete, under the march of mind, and the progress of improvement, the long-mooted question of the existence of the fairies, would have been settled on what in past ages of ignorance, was considered the most substantial basis, to wit, ocular demonstration. But, alas! seeing is not believing in this unbelieving age; and though the accumulated testimony of the existence of these little sprites, if brought to bear on a question of fact, would satisfy any Court or Jury in Christendom, still the skepticism of Science, and the hardness of Philosophy, have at all times wilfully shut their eyes to a chain of evidence, which would be amply sufficient, to hang a hundred innocent persons, where hanging was in fashion.

It has been, however, settled by the decisions of almost all the learned, of the present times, at least, that credulity and superstition are incompatible with a certain degree of knowledge and general intelligence; and that in proportion as these latter become widely diffused, the airy creations of hope, fear, and fancy, vanish like spectres at the dawn of day. But I must confess that I for one doubt the validity of this empty pretension. All, for example, unite in boasting, that the present is the most enlightened age the world ever knew; and yet do we not every day see the most enormous impositions practised on the credulity of mankind, which, in their consequences, are a thousand times more mischievous, than the innocent superstitions of classic, or oriental lore!



Shall we dare to boast, without blushing in each other's faces, that science and knowledge have banished superstition and credulity from the world, while the recollection of the imposture of Matthias is fresh in our minds; while the wretched train of fanatics, called Mormonites, continues to rove over the land with increasing numbers; while the Shakers remain steadfast in their faith in the supernatural powers of Jemima Wilkinson; and above all, while millions of enlightened people believe to this day, that a "promise to pay," is equivalent to actual payment?

Those who have taken the pains to investigate the history of the human mind, in its progress from age to age, will, I think, be perfectly satisfied, that there is just about as much superstition and credulity in one as in another, and that the only difference is in the modes by which they manifest themselves. Compare, for example, the love of Fairy land, with the rare absurdities, of what is called the Science of Phrenology, or the still more outrageous imposture of Animal Magnetism, and then ask ourselves, which requires the greatest stretch of human credulity, or abject superstition, in order to swallow its strange improbabilities? The latter most especially, is quite as much at war, with all the known laws of nature, of matter, and the organization of matter, of mind and its sphere of action, as is the being and agency of the fairies in the affairs of mankind. The truth is, that as in the individual, so in the never-ceasing changes of this rolling orb, every revolving period, every new acquisition of years, produces a new succession of shadows, which are pursued with equal avidity, and equal faith in their reality. New game starts up at every step before us, and while we acknowledge to ourselves, that what we have run down, was but a series of unsubstantial nothings, we still continue the pursuit of the objects before us, with an eagerness, which, like that of the gambler, increases with every unsuccessful cast.

For my part, if we must be the tools of superstition and credulity, as seems to be our destiny, I confess I prefer the ancient, to the modern mode of playing on these instruments. It is not alone, because the little pranks of mischief or beneficence, played by the elves and fairies, are associated with that period of our existence, which seems all sunshine and flowers, as we look back upon it,

that the story of these tiny beings, appeals to the memory and fancy, with such alluring fascinations. There is something intrinsically delightful in these airy creations, whether of the imagination or the senses. Their agency was of a light, pleasing, and gentle character, and unlike the old Gothic superstitions, devoid of cruelty or malignity. In their kindness they were beneficent and even in their punishments, there was nothing to inspire terror, horror, or despair. All was diminutive in Fairy land; the little beings did not, like giants, ogres, and witches, indulge unnatural appetites, or deal in bloody atrocities. They were the creations of an age of comparative simplicity and innocence, and partook in the characteristics of pastoral gentleness. They were associated with flocks and herds, shepherds and shepherdesses; their delight was solitude; their harmonies those of nature; and their sports were in the silence of night, by the light of the moon. They were in truth, a pure and gentle race; the records of their agency in human affairs, afford the finest lessons of morality to the infant mind; the romantic air, the rich invention, and inspiring interest embodied in them, are in truth highly contrasted, with the greater portion of those abortions of mind and imagination, which have since superseded them, and over which our children daily pass to the region of Morpheus.

But even those who are willing to acknowledge the existence of fairies in the Old World, sturdily deny that they have ever yet honoured the New with their presence. Absurd and foolish incredulity! Do not the elfin race love repose and liberty; and can it be supposed for a moment, that they could resist the temptation of the boundless solitudes of nature, and the generous freedom of this vast hemisphere? No. Every presumption is in favour of the authenticity of the following statement, which I proceed to lay before the reader, as well for the purpose of demonstrating the emigration of the fairies, as to account satisfactorily for the appearance of the following legends, as the dogmatical learned are pleased to call the authentic records of Fairy land.

Sometime in the year 1818, or 1819, (for in regard to this there is some little uncertainty, owing to the want of Almanacs, in this particular region of country, at that time,) Mr. Simeon Starkweather emigrated from Buncombe county, North Carolina, to

the great West, in search of better land, though if the truth must be told, that which he already possessed was quite good enough to satisfy a reasonable man. But in the first place, he had been told there were sections of country in Kentucky, considerably richer than any the Almighty ever formed, where it was only to stamp on the ground, and the wheat would spring up higher than your ears; and in the second place, he was impelled by the great maxim of "go ahead," which brought his ancestors from the Old World, and will never rest till it has carried their posterity to the uttermost extremity of the New, where I suppose they will jump off, in search of another still newer.

Being determined to proceed far enough, Simeon, or Sim, as he was familiarly called, continued to go ahead, till he came into what is now called Simpson county—so denominated after his name—where he pitched his tent, just at the head of one of the sources of Green river, which joins the Ohio, where Evansville now stands. It was not far from the Big Barren, so called, because it bears no trees, though I am told it is one of the most fertile spots in all Kentucky. The first settlers of that fine Old State—it is almost half a century old—were mighty hunters before the Lord, and considered the land as "trifling," which afforded no shelter for game.

Sim was delighted with his new "location," where he had all out doors for his patrimony, and plenty of elbow room. He shot all the spring, summer, and autumn, and in the winter set traps, for all sorts of outlandish animals. In short, as he told me, "he lived a free and easy life—the happiest in the world, for he shaved himself only once a year, and had a most Almighty everlasting sprinkle of varmints all about him."

Here he resided a good number of years, undisturbed, save now and then by an interloper, who came to settle some ten or twenty miles off in the neighbourhood, and molested him a little. But all at once he became subject to divers strange annoyances, only one of which I shall mention, for fear of being circumstantial and tedious. He continually found that the game which had been caught, as he could see by the marks on his traps, was stolen away during the night, or had released itself in some manner, for which he could not account. He at last determined to lay in