

**A SNUFF-BOX FULL
OF TREES: SOME
APOCRYPHAL ESSAYS**

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A Snuff-Box Full of Trees: Some Apocryphal Essays by W. D. Ellwanger

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W. D. ELLWANGER

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APOCRYPHAL ESSAYS**

**A Snuff-box
Full of Trees**

A Snuff-box Full of Trees

& Some Apocryphal Essays

by

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"A Summer Snowflake"

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A Snuff-box Full of Trees

CALIFORNIA gave to the world in 1849 not only the most wondrous wealth known up to that time, but also the tallest trees that ever grew toward heaven. Somewhere in the early fifties G. H. Woodruff joined the throng of gold hunters and went West to seek his fortune. So far as is known he found no gold, but, as the story runs, after a year or more of disappointments, he found himself one day in the forest primeval, forlorn and disconsolate. He threw himself on the ground, and, yielding to despair, gazed up into the treetops for help or resignation. Above him towered the big trees of the world, the grand Giganteas. You may call them, as you please, Gigantea, Washingtonia, or Wellingtonia. Their generic name is an arbitrary one, and it is still a disputed question whether they were first found and named by an Englishman or an American. No worry of nomenclature disturbed Mr. Woodruff, but he knew trees. They had been part and par-

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cel of his education, and as he lay on his back and looked up into their glorious heights, he appreciated their grandeur and rejoiced in their beauty. Also he noticed that the squirrels were nibbling at the cones above him, and dropping some of the seed shells at his feet. He thought that these seeds might be propagated successfully, and gathered a number of them. These he put into a snuff-box and at the first opportunity sent them to Ellwanger & Barry, nurserymen, at Rochester, N. Y. The snuff-box came by pony express across the continent, and the express charges for the little packet were \$25. The seeds were duly sown and propagated by Messrs. Ellwanger & Barry, as appears from a letter in which they said:

January 11, 1855.

We have already one box of the seed sowed in our rose house under glass, a nice temperature of about 50 to 60 degrees. If it will do well anywhere it must do there. We shall sow all in boxes under glass, as the plants will be less liable to damp and wither off. We have agreed to grow the plants on shares as proposed, but if you prefer to sell it you might name your price for it.

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More seeds were afterward gathered and sent and propagated, with results shown in a second letter :

January 26, 1856.

We did all in our power with them; some of the seeds never vegetated and some came slowly. They have been coming through the ground all summer. We have succeeded in obtaining about 4000 plants, all of which are out of danger, we think; they are all in pots, and as there is no demand yet for them in this country we have shipped 400 to England to be sold, and shall send more as needed. We intend to advertise them here this spring at \$2 per plant.

So much for the finding of these seeds and their propagation. Their subsequent growth and development, and their dispersion from Rochester over all of Europe, make another chapter in their story. If it seems a far cry from these little potted pigmies to the giants of the forest, it is necessary only to turn to Messrs. Ellwanger & Barry's catalogue of 1857 for encouragement as to their possibilities. In that catalogue these plants were thus offered for sale: "Washingtonia Gigantea, the Celebrated Big Tree of Califor-

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nia; Wellingtonia of the English, and Sequoia of the French; one of the most majestic trees in the world. Specimens have been measured upward of 300 feet in height and thirty-two feet in diameter three feet from the ground. We think it will prove hardy here, as several specimens stood out unprotected last winter. Mr. Reid, of New Jersey, has also found it hardy with him. One dollar to two dollars."

But either this advertisement was too modest or the commendation too conservative, for the plants found few buyers here. Even in 1856 the growers had to look to foreign markets for the sale of the greatest native American industry, if a big tree of California, 300 feet high, may be so characterized. William Skirving, nurseryman, of Liverpool, England, bought the first hundred of the plants in that year. Later he bought 250 more, then again 500 and 500 and 500 and 500, making in all 2350. So the squirrel seeds began to take root and grow and spread in English soil. And Mr. Skirving's purchase proved profitable to him in more ways than one. For he has told that when the first invoice of plants arrived he was quite ill and con-