

Fairy Dust

A Story for Children

FROM THE FRENCH OF GEORGE SAND.



LONG time ago—
a very long time
—I was young,
and often heard
people complain
of a troublesome
little creature who
made her way in
by the window, after she had
been driven out at the door.
She was so light and so tiny
that she might have been said
to float rather than to walk, and
my parents compared her to a
little fairy. The servants de-
tested her, and sent her flying
with their dusting brushes; but
they had no sooner dislodged
her from one resting-place than
she re-appeared at another.

She was always dressed in a slatternly
trailing grey gown, and a sort of veil which
the least breath of wind sent whirling about
her head with its yellowish dishevelled locks.

Seeing her so persecuted made me take
pity on her, and I willingly allowed her to
rest herself in my little garden, though she
oppressed my flowers a great deal. I talked
with her, but without ever being able to
draw from her a single word of common
sense. She wished to touch everything,
saying she was doing no harm. I got
scolded for tolerating her, and when I had
allowed her to come too near me, I was sent
to wash myself and change my clothes, and
was even threatened with being called by
her name.

It was such a bad name that I dreaded it
greatly. She was so dirty that some said
she slept on the sweepings of the houses
and streets; and that that was why she was
called Fairy Dust.



"IN MY LITTLE GARDEN."

"Why are you so dirty?" I asked
her, one day, when she wanted to kiss
me.

"You are a stupid to be afraid of me,"
she answered, laughingly; "you belong to
me, and resemble me more than you think.
But you are a child, the slave of ignorance,
and I should waste my time by trying to
make you understand."

"Come," I said, "you seem inclined to
talk sense at last. Explain to me what you
have just said."

"I can't talk to you here," she replied.
"I have too much to say to you, and, as
soon as I settle down in any part of your
house I am brushed away with contempt;
but, if you wish to know who I am, call me
three times to-night as soon as you fall
asleep."

That said, she hurried away, uttering a
hearty laugh, and I seemed to see her
dissolve into a mist of gold, reddened by
the setting sun.

When I was in bed that night I thought of her just as I was going to sleep.

"I've dreamed all that," I said to myself, "or else that little old creature is a mad

At the same moment I was transported into an immense garden, in the midst of which stood an enchanted palace, and on the threshold of this marvellous dwelling



THE ENCHANTED PALACE.

thing. How can I possibly call her when I am asleep?"

I fell off to sleep, and presently dreamed that I called her; I am not sure that I did not even call to her aloud, three times, "Fairy Dust! Fairy Dust! Fairy Dust!"

stood awaiting me a lady resplendent with youth and beauty, dressed in magnificent festal clothes.

I flew to her, and she kissed me, saying—"Well, do you recognise Fairy Dust!"

"No, not in the least, madame," I

answered, "and I think you must be making fun of me."

"I am not making fun of you at all," she replied, "but as you are not able to understand what I say to you, I am going to show you a sight which will appear strange, and which I will make as brief as possible. Follow me!"

She led me into the most beautiful part of her residence. It was a little limpid lake, resembling a green diamond set in a ring of flowers, in which were sporting fish of all hues of orange and cornelian, Chinese amber-coloured carp, black and white swans, exotic ducks decked in jewels, and, at the bottom, pearl and purple shells, bright-coloured aquatic salamanders; in short, a world of living wonders, gliding and plunging above a bed of silvery sand, on which were growing all sorts of water-plants, one more charming than another. Around this vast basin were ranged in several circles a colonnade of porphyry, with alabaster capitals. The entablature was made of the most precious minerals, and almost disappeared under a growth of clematis, jessamine, briony and honeysuckle, amid which a thousand birds made their nests. Roses of all tints and all scents were reflected in the water as well as the porphyry columns and the beautiful statues of Parian marble placed under the arcades. In the midst of the basin a fountain threw a thousand jets of diamonds and pearls.

The bottom of the architectural amphitheatre opened upon flower-beds shaded by giant trees, loaded to their summits with blossoms and fruit, their branches interlaced with trailing vines, forming above the porphyry colonnade a colonnade of verdure and flowers.

There the Fairy made me seat myself with her at the entrance to a grotto, whence there issued a melodious cascade, flowing over fresh moss sparkling with diamond drops of water.

"All that you see there is my work," she said to me; "all that is made of dust. It is by the shaking of my gown in the clouds that I have furnished all the materials of this paradise. My friend Fire, who threw them into the air, has taken them back to re-cook them, to crystallise or compact them, after which my servant Wind took them about with him amid the moisture and electricity of the clouds, and then cast them upon the earth; this wide plain has then arisen from my fecund substance, and rain has made sands and grass of it, after

having made rocks into porphyries, marbles, and metals of all sorts."

I listened without understanding, and I thought that the Fairy was continuing to mystify me. How she could have made the earth out of dust still passes my comprehension; that she could have made marble and granites and other minerals merely by shaking the skirt of her gown, I could not believe. But I did not dare to contradict her, though I turned involuntarily towards her to see whether she was speaking seriously of such an absurdity.

What was my surprise to find she was no longer behind me! but I heard her voice, seemingly coming from under the ground, calling me. At the same time I also passed under ground without being able to resist, and found myself in a terrible place where all was fire and flame. I had heard tell of the infernal region; I thought that was it. Lights, red, blue, green, white, violet—now pale, now swelling, replaced daylight, and, if the sun penetrated to this place, the vapours which arose from the furnace made it wholly invisible.

Formidable sounds, sharp hisses, explosions, claps of thunder, filled this clouded cavern in which I felt myself enclosed. In the midst of all this I perceived little Fairy Dust, who had gone back to her dirty colourless dress. She came and went, working, pushing, piling, clutching, pouring out I know not what acids; in a word, giving herself up to an incomprehensible labour.

"Don't be afraid," she said to me, in a voice that rose above the deafening noises of this Tartarus. "You are here in my laboratory. Don't you know anything about machinery?"

"Nothing at all," I shouted, "and I don't want to learn about it in such a place as this."

"Yes, you wanted to know, and you must resign yourself to me. It is very pleasant to live on the surface of the earth, with flowers, birds, and domesticated animals, to bathe in still waters, to eat nice-tasting fruits, to walk upon carpets of greensward and daisies. You imagined that life has always existed in that way, under such blessed conditions. It is time you should learn something about the beginning of things, and of the power of Fairy Dust, your grandmother, your mother, and your nurse."

As she spoke the little creature made me roll with her into the depths of the abyss,

through devouring flames, frightful explosions, acrid black smoke, metals in fusion, lavas vomiting hideously, and all the terrors of volcanic eruption.

"These are my furnaces," she said, "the underground where my provisions elaborate themselves. You see, it is a good place for a mind disencumbered of the shell called a body. You have left yours in your bed, and your mind alone is with me. So you may touch and clutch primary matter. You are ignorant of chemistry; you do not yet know of what this matter is made, nor by what mysterious operation what appears here under the aspect of solid bodies come from a gaseous body which has shone in space, first as a nebula and later as a beaming sun. You are a child; I cannot initiate you into the great secrets of creation, and there is a long time yet to be passed before your professors themselves will know them. But I can show you the products of my culinary art. All here is somewhat confused for you. Let us mount a stage. Hold the ladder, and follow me."

A ladder, of which I could not perceive either the bottom or the top, stood before us. I followed the Fairy, and found myself in darkness, but I then noticed that she herself was wholly luminous and radiant as a torch. I then observed enormous deposits of oozy paste, blocks of whitish crystal and immense waves of black and shining vitreous matter, which the Fairy took up and crumbled between her fingers; then she piled the crystal in little heaps, and mixed all with the moist paste, and placed the whole on what she was pleased to call a gentle fire.



"WHAT DISH ARE YOU GOING TO MAKE OF THAT?"

"What dish are you going to make of that?" I asked.

"A dish necessary to your poor little existence," she replied. "I am making granite,—that is to say, with dust I make the hardest and most resisting of stones: it needs that to enclose Cocytus and Phlegethon. I make also various mixtures of the same elements. Here is what is shown to you under barbarous names—gneiss, the

quartzes, the talcs, the micas, *et cetera*. Of all that which comes from my dust, I, later on, make other dusts with new elements, which will then be slates, sand, and gravel. I am skilful and patient; I pulverise unceasingly to reaggregate. Is not flour the basis of all cakes? At the present time I imprison my furnaces, contriving for them some necessary vents, so that they may not burst. We will go above and see what is going on. If you are tired, you may take a nap, for it will take me a little to accomplish what I am going to do."

I lost all consciousness of time,

and when the Fairy waked me:

"You have been sleeping a pretty considerable number of ages!" she said.

"How many, Madame Fairy?"

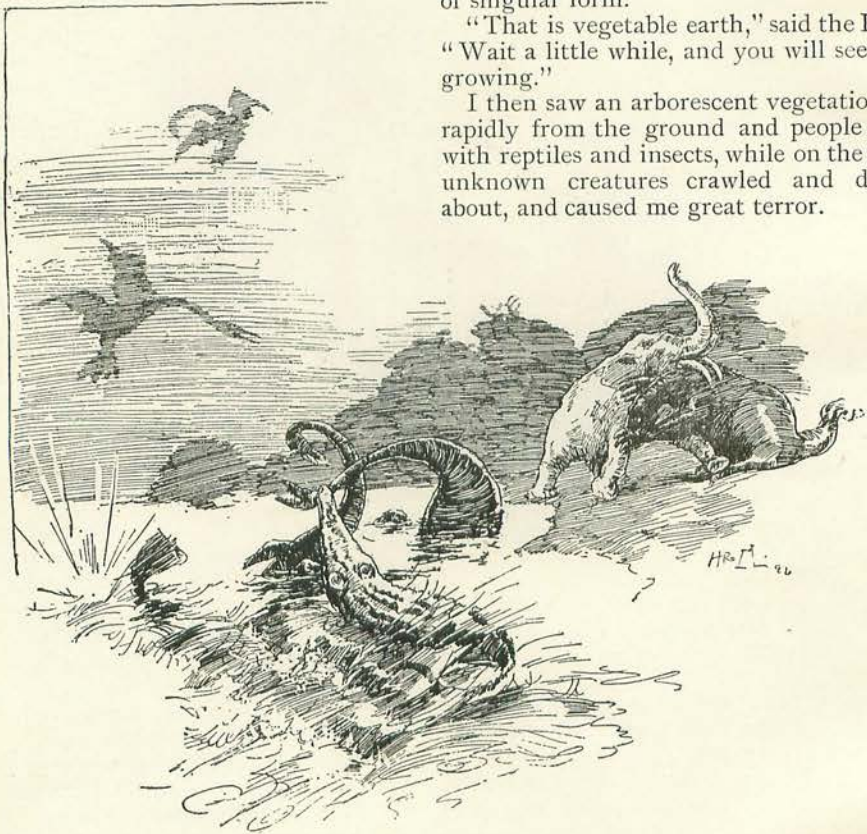
"You must ask that of your professors," she replied, laughing. "Let us go on up the ladder."

She made me mount several stages through divers deposits, where I saw her manipulate the rust of metals, of which she made chalk, marl, clay, slate, jasper; and, as I questioned her as to the origin of metals:

"You want to know a great deal about it," she said. "Your inquirers may explain

many phenomena by fire and water ; but could they know what was passing between earth and heaven when all my dust, cast by wind from the abyss, has formed solid clouds, which clouds of water have rolled in their stormy whirl, which thunder has penetrated with its mysterious loadstone, and which the stronger winds have thrown upon a terrestrial surface in torrential rains? There is the origin of the first deposits. You are going to witness these marvellous transformations."

We mounted higher, and came to chalks, marbles, and banks of limestone enough to build a city as big as the entire globe.



"A WORLD OF MONSTERS."

And as I was wondering at what she was able to produce by sifting, agglomerating, metamorphosing, and baking, she said to me :

"All that is nothing ; you are going to see a great deal more than that—you are going to see life, already hatched in the middle of these stones."

She approached a basin wide as a sea, and, plunging her arms into it, drew from it—first, strange plants, then animals, stranger still, which were as yet half plants ; then beings, free and independent of one another, living shells ; then, at last, fish, which she made leap, saying as she did so :

"That's what Dame Dust knows how to produce, when she pleases, at the bottom of water. But there's something better than that. Turn round and look at the shore."

I turned. The calcar and all its components, mixed with flint and clay, had formed on the surface a fine brown and rich dust, out of which had sprung fibrous plants of singular form.

"That is vegetable earth," said the Fairy. "Wait a little while, and you will see trees growing."

I then saw an arborescent vegetation rise rapidly from the ground and people itself with reptiles and insects, while on the shore unknown creatures crawled and darted about, and caused me great terror.

"These animals will not alarm you on the earth of the future," said the Fairy. "They are destined to manure it with their remains. There are not yet any human beings here to fear them."

"Hold!" I cried ; "here is a world of monsters that shock me! Here is your earth belonging to these devouring crea-

tures who live upon one another. Do you need all these massacres and all these stupidities to make us a muck-heap? I can understand their not being good for anything else, but I can't understand a creation so rich in animated forms to do nothing and to leave nothing worth anything behind it."

"Manure is something, if it is not everything; the conditions it will create will be favourable to different beings who will succeed those on which you are looking."

"And which will disappear in their turn, I know that. I know that creation will go on improving itself up to the creation of Man—at least, that is, I think, what I have been told. But I had not pictured to myself this prodigality of life and destruction, which terrifies me and fills me with repugnance; these hideous forms, these gigantic amphibia, these monstrous crocodiles, and all these crawling or swimming beasts which seem to live only to use their teeth and devour one another."

My indignation highly amused Fairy Dust.

"Matter is matter," she replied, "it is always logical in its operations. The human mind is not—and you have proved it—you who live by eating charming birds, and a crowd of creatures more beautiful and intelligent than these. Have I to teach you that there is no production possible without permanent destruction, and would you like to reverse the order of nature?"

"Yes, I would—I should like that all should go well from the first day. If Nature is a great fairy she might have done without all these abominable experiments, and made a world in which we should all have been angels, living by mind only, in the bosom of an unchangeable and always beautiful creation."

"The great fairy Nature has higher views," replied Dame Dust. "She does not intend to stop at the things of which you know. She is always at work and inventing. For her, for whom there is no such thing as the suspension of life, rest would be death. If things did not change the work of the King of the Genii would be ended, and this king, who is incessant and supreme activity, would end with his work. The world which you see, and to which you will return presently when your vision of the past has faded away, this world of man, which you think is better than that of the ancient animals, this world with which you yet are not satisfied, since you wish to live

eternally in a pure spiritual condition, this poor planet, still in a state of infancy, is destined to transform itself infinitely. The future will make of you all—feeble human creatures that you are—fairies and genii possessing science, reason, and goodness. You have seen what I have shown to you, that these first drafts of life, representing simply instinct, are nearer to you than you are to that which will some day be the reign of mind in the earth which you inhabit. The occupants of that future world will then have the right to despise you, as you now despise the world of the great saurians."

"Oh! if that is so," I replied, "if all that I have seen of the past will make me think the better of the future, let me see more that is new."

"And, above all," said the Fairy, "don't let us too much despise the past, for fear of committing the ingratitude of despising the present. When the great Spirit of life used the materials which furnished it, it did marvels from the first day. Look at the eyes of this monster which your learned men have called the ichthyosaurus."

"They are as large as my head, and frighten me."

"They are very superior to yours. They are at once long and short-sighted at will. They see prey at great distances as with a telescope, and when it is quite near, by a simple change of action, they see it perfectly at its true distance without needing spectacles. At that moment of creation nature had but one purpose: to make a thinking animal. It gave to this creature organs marvellously appropriate to its wants. Don't you think it made a very pretty beginning—are you not struck by it? In this way it will proceed from better to better, with all the beings which are to succeed those you now see. Those which appear to you poor, ugly, pitiful, are yet prodigies of adaptation to the place in the midst of which they have manifested themselves."

"And, like the others, they think of nothing but eating!"

"Of what would you have them think? The earth has no wish to be admired. The sky, which exists to-day and for ever, will continue to exist without the aspirations and prayers of tiny living creatures adding anything to the splendour and majesty of its laws. The fairy of your little planet, no doubt, knows the great First Cause; but if she is ordered to make a being who shall

perceive or guess that Cause, it will be in obedience to the law of time—that law of which you can form no idea, because you live too short a space to appreciate its operations. You think those operations slow, yet they are carried on with a bewildering rapidity. I will free your mind from its natural weakness, and show you in rotation the results of innumerable centuries. Look, and don't cavil any more, but profit by my kindness to you."

I felt that the Fairy was right, and I looked, with all my eyes, at the succession of aspects of the earth. I saw the birth and death of vegetables and of animals become more and more vigorous from instinct, and more and more agreeable or imposing in form. In proportion as the ground decked itself with productions more nearly resembling those of our days, the inhabitants of this widespread garden, in which great accidents were incessantly transforming, appeared to become less eager to destroy each other, and more careful of their progeny. I saw them construct dwelling-places for the use of their families, and exhibit attachment for localities, so much so that, from moment to moment, I saw a world fade away, and a new world arise in its place, like the changing of the scenes in a fairy-play.

"Rest awhile," the Fairy said to me, "for, without suspecting it, you have traversed a good many thousands of centuries, and Mr. Man is going to be born when the reign of Mr. Monkey has been completed."

I once more fell asleep, quite overcome by fatigue, and when I awoke I found my-

self in the midst of a grand hall in the palace of the Fairy, who had again become young, beautiful, and splendidly dressed.

"You see all these charming things, and all this charming company?" she said to me. "Well, my child, all that is *dust*! These walls of porphyry and marble are dust, molecules kneaded and roasted to a turn. These buildings of cut stone are the dust of lime or of granite, brought about by the same process. These crystal lustres are fine sand baked by the hands of men in imitation of the work of Nature. These porcelain and china articles are the powder of feldspar, the kaolin of which the Chinese have taught us the use. These diamonds

in which the dancers are decked is coal-dust crystallised. These pearls are phosphate of lime which the oyster exudes into its shell. Gold and all the metals have no other origin than the assemblage, well heaped, well melted, well heated, and well cooled, of infinitesimal molecules. These beautiful vegetables, these flesh-coloured roses, these stainless lilies, these gardenias which embalm the air, are born of dust which I prepared for them; and these people who dance and smile at the sound of those musical in-

struments, these living creatures *par excellence*, who are called persons, they also—don't be offended—are born of me, and will be returned to me."

As she said that, the hall and the palace disappeared. I found myself with the Fairy in a field of corn. She stooped, and picked up a stone in which there was a shell encrusted.

"There," she said, "in a fossil state is a



"THE FAIRY HAD AGAIN BECOME YOUNG AND BEAUTIFUL."

being which I showed you in the earliest ages of life. What is it now?—phosphate of lime. Reducing it to dust, people make manure of it for land that is too flinty. You see, Man is beginning to understand one thing—that the master to study is Nature."

She crumbled the shell into powder, and scattered it on the cultivated soil, saying :

"This will come back to my kitchen. I spread destruction to make the germ spring. It is so of all dusts, whether they be plants, animals, or persons. They are death, after having been life, and there is nothing sad in it, since, thanks to me, they always begin again to live after having been dead. Farewell! You greatly admired my ball dress : here is a piece of it, which you may examine at your leisure."

All disappeared, and, when I opened my eyes, I found myself in my bed. The sun

had risen, and sent a bright ray towards me. I looked for the piece of stuff which the Fairy had put into my hand : it was nothing but a little heap of dust ; but my mind was still under the charm of the dream, and it gave to my senses the power of distinguishing the smallest atom of this dust.

I was filled with wonderment. There was everything in it : air, water, sun, gold, diamonds, ashes, the pollen of flowers, shells, pearls, the dust of butterflies' wings, of thread, of wax, of iron, of wood, and of many microscopic bodies ; but in the midst of this mixture of imperceptible refuse, I saw fermenting I know not what life of undistinguishable beings, that appeared to be trying to fix themselves to something, to hatch or to transform themselves, all confounded in a golden mist, or in the roseate rays of the rising sun.



"SHE STOOPED AND PICKED UP A STONE."