

# THE ARABIAN NIGHTS

♦ THEIR BEST-KNOWN TALES ♦



Edited by Kate Douglas Wiggin and Nora A. Smith  
ILLUSTRATED BY MAXFIELD PARRISH



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CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS  
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## P R E F A C E

*LITTLE* excuse is needed, perhaps, for any fresh selection from the famous “*Tales of a Thousand and One Nights*,” provided it be representative enough, and worthy enough, to enlist a new army of youthful readers. Of the two hundred and sixty-four bewildering, unparalleled stories, the true lover can hardly spare one, yet there must always be favourites, even among these. We have chosen some of the most delightful, in our opinion; some, too, that chanced to appeal particularly to the genius of the artist. If, enticed by our choice and the beauty of the pictures, we manage to attract a few thousand more true lovers to the fountain-book, we shall have served our humble turn. The only real danger lies in neglecting it, in rearing a child who does not know it and has never fallen under its spell.

You remember *Maimoune*, in the story of *Prince Camaralzaman*, and what she said to *Danhasch*, the genie who had just arrived from the farthest limits of China? “Be sure thou tellest me nothing but what is true or I shall clip thy wings!” This is what the modern child sometimes says to the genies of literature, and his own wings are too often clipped in consequence.

“The Empire of the Fairies is no more.  
Reason has banished them from ev’ry shore;  
Steam has outstripped their dragons and their cars,  
Gas has eclipsed their glow-worms and their stars.”

*Edouard Laboulaye* says in his introduction to *Nouveaux Contes Bleus*: “Mothers who love your children, do not set them too soon to the study of history; let them dream while they are young. Do not close the soul to the first breath of poetry. Noth-

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*ing affrights me so much as the reasonable, practical child who believes in nothing that he cannot touch. These sages of ten years are, at twenty, dullards, or what is still worse, egoists."*

*When a child has once read of Prince Agib, of Gulnare or Periezade, Sinbad or Codadad, in this or any other volume of its kind, the magic will have been instilled into the blood, for the Oriental flavour in the Arab tales is like nothing so much as magic. True enough they are a vast storehouse of information concerning the manners and the customs, the spirit and the life of the Moslem East (and the youthful reader does not have to study Lane's learned foot-notes to imbibe all this), but beyond and above the knowledge of history and geography thus gained, there comes something finer and subtler as well as something more vital. The scene is Indian, Egyptian, Arabian, Persian; but Bagdad and Balsora, Grand Cairo, the silver Tigris, and the blooming gardens of Damascus, though they can be found indeed on the map, live much more truly in that enchanted realm that rises o'er "the foam of perilous seas in faery lands forlorn." What craft can sail those perilous seas like the book that has been called a great three-decker to carry tired people to Islands of the Blest? "The immortal fragment," says Sir Richard Burton, who perhaps knew the Arabian Nights as did no other European, "will never be superseded in the infallible judgment of childhood. The marvellous imaginativeness of the Tales produces an insensible brightness of mind and an increase of fancy-power, making one dream that behind them lies the new and unseen, the strange and unexpected—in fact, all the glamour of the unknown."*

*It would be a delightful task to any boy or girl to begin at the beginning and read the first English version of these famous stories, made from the collection of M. Galland, Professor of Arabic in the Royal College of Paris. The fact that they had passed from*

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*Arabic into French and from French into English did not prevent their instantaneous popularity. This was in 1704 or thereabouts, and the world was not so busy as it is nowadays, or young men would not have gathered in the middle of the night under M. Galland's window and cried: "O vous, qui savez de si jolis contes, et qui les racontez si bien, racontez nous en un!"*

*You can also read them in Scott's edition or in Lane's (both of which, but chiefly the former, we have used as the foundation of our text), while your elders—philologists or Orientalists—are studying the complete versions of John Payne or Sir Richard Burton. You may leave the wiseacres to wonder which were told in China or India, Arabia or Persia, and whether the first manuscript dates back to 1450 or earlier.*

*We, like many other editors, have shortened the stories here and there, omitting some of the tedious repetitions that crept in from time to time when Arabian story-tellers were adding to the text to suit their purposes.*

*Mr. Andrew Lang says amusingly that he has left out of his special versions "all the pieces that are suitable only for Arabs and old gentlemen," and we have done the same; but we have taken no undue liberties. We have removed no genies nor magicians, however terrible; have cut out no base deed of Vizier nor noble deed of Sultan; have diminished the size of no roc's egg, nor omitted any single allusion to the great and only Haroun-al-Raschid, Caliph of Bagdad, Commander of the Faithful, who must have been a great inspirer of good stories.*

*Enter into this "treasure house of pleasant things," then, and make yourself at home in the golden palaces, the gem-studded caves, the bewildering gardens. Sit by its mysterious fountains, hear the plash of its gleaming cascades, unearth its magic lamps and talismans, behold its ensorcelled princes and princesses.*

## PREFACE

*Nowhere in the whole realm of literature will you find such a Marvel, such a Wonder, such a Nonesuch of a book; nowhere will you find impossibilities so real and so convincing; nowhere but in what Henley calls:*

*“ . . . that blessèd brief  
Of what is gallantest and best  
In all the full-shelved Libraries of Romance.  
The Book of rocs,  
Sandalwood, ivory, turbans, ambergris,  
Cream-tarts, and lettered apes, and Calenders,  
And ghouls, and genies—O so huge  
They might have overed the tall Minster Tower,  
Hands down, as schoolboys take a post;  
In truth the Book of Camaralzaman,  
Schemselnihar and Sinbad, Scheherezade  
The peerless, Bedreddin, Badroulbador,  
Cairo and Serendib and Candahar,  
And Caspian, and the dim, terrific bulk—  
Ice-ribbed, fiend-visited, isled in spells and storms—  
Of Kaf . . . That centre of miracles  
The sole, unparalleled Arabian Nights.”*

KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN.

August, 1909.



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FROM DRAWINGS IN COLORS  
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## THE TALKING BIRD, THE SINGING TREE, AND THE GOLDEN WATER

**T**HERE was an emperor of Persia named Kosrouschah, who, when he first came to his crown, in order to obtain a knowledge of affairs, took great pleasure in night excursions, attended by a trusty minister. He often walked in disguise through the city, and met with many adventures, one of the most remarkable of which happened to him upon his first ramble, which was not long after his accession to the throne of his father.

After the ceremonies of his father's funeral rites and his own inauguration were over, the new sultan, as well from inclination as from duty, went out one evening attended by his grand vizier, disguised like himself, to observe what was transacting in the city. As he was passing through a street in that part of the town inhabited only by the meaner sort, he heard some people talking very loud; and going close to the house whence the noise proceeded, and looking through a crack in the door, perceived a light, and three sisters sitting on a sofa, conversing together after supper. By what the eldest said he presently understood the subject of their conversation was wishes: "for," said she, "since we are talking about wishes, mine shall be to have the sultan's baker for my husband, for then I shall eat my fill of that bread, which by way of excellence is called the sultan's; let us see if your tastes are as good as mine." "For my part," replied the second sister,

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“I wish I was wife to the sultan’s chief cook, for then I should eat of the most excellent dishes; and as I am persuaded that the sultan’s bread is common in the palace, I should not want any of that; therefore you see,” addressing herself to her eldest sister, “that I have a better taste than you.” The youngest sister, who was very beautiful, and had more charms and wit than the two elder, spoke in her turn: “For my part, sisters,” said she, “I shall not limit my desires to such trifles, but take a higher flight; and since we are upon wishing, I wish to be the emperor’s queen-consort. I would make him father of a prince, whose hair should be gold on one side of his head, and silver on the other; when he cried, the tears from his eyes should be pearls; and when he smiled, his vermilion lips should look like a rosebud fresh-blown.”

The three sisters’ wishes, particularly that of the youngest, seemed so singular to the sultan, that he resolved to gratify them in their desires; but without communicating his design to his grand vizier, he charged him only to take notice of the house, and bring the three sisters before him the following day.

The grand vizier, in executing the emperor’s orders, would but just give the sisters time to dress themselves to appear before his majesty, without telling them the reason. He brought them to the palace, and presented them to the emperor, who said to them, “Do you remember the wishes you expressed last night, when you were all in so pleasant a mood? Speak the truth; I must know what they were.” At these unexpected words of the emperor, the three sisters were much confounded. They cast down their eyes and blushed, and the colour which rose in the cheeks of the youngest quite captivated the emperor’s heart. Modesty, and fear lest they might have offended by their conversation, kept them silent. The emperor, perceiving their confusion, said to

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encourage them, "Fear nothing, I did not send for you to distress you; and since I see that without my intending it, this is the effect of the question I asked, as I know the wish of each, I will relieve you from your fears. You," added he, "who wished to be my wife, shall have your desire this day; and you," continued he, addressing himself to the two elder sisters, "shall also be married to my chief baker and cook."

As soon as the sultan had declared his pleasure, the youngest sister, setting her elders an example, threw herself at the emperor's feet to express her gratitude. "Sir," said she, "my wish, since it is come to your majesty's knowledge, was expressed only in the way of conversation and amusement. I am unworthy of the honour you do me, and supplicate your pardon for my presumption." The other two sisters would have excused themselves also, but the emperor, interrupting them, said, "No, no; it shall be as I have declared; the wishes of all shall be fulfilled." The nuptials were all celebrated that day, as the emperor had resolved, but in a different manner. The youngest sister's were solemnized with all the rejoicings usual at the marriages of the emperors of Persia; and those of the other two sisters according to the quality and distinction of their husbands; the one as the sultan's chief baker, and the other as head cook.

The two elder felt strongly the disproportion of their marriages to that of their younger sister. This consideration made them far from being content, though they were arrived at the utmost height of their late wishes, and much beyond their hopes. They gave themselves up to an excess of jealousy, which not only disturbed their joy, but was the cause of great trouble and affliction to the queen-consort, their younger sister. They had not an opportunity to communicate their thoughts to each other on the preference the emperor had given her, but were altogether em-

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ployed in preparing themselves for the celebration of their marriages. Some days afterward, when they had an opportunity of seeing each other at the public baths, the eldest said to the other: "Well, what say you to our sister's great fortune? Is not she a fine person to be a queen!" "I must own," said the other sister, "I cannot conceive what charms the emperor could discover to be so bewitched by her. Was it a reason sufficient for him not to cast his eyes on you, because she was somewhat younger? You were as worthy of his throne, and in justice he ought to have preferred you."

"Sister," said the elder, "I should not have regretted if his majesty had but pitched upon you; but that he should choose that little simpleton really grieves me. But I will revenge myself; and you, I think, are as much concerned as I; therefore, I propose that we should contrive measures and act in concert: communicate to me what you think the likeliest way to mortify her, while I, on my side, will inform you what my desire of revenge shall suggest to me." After this wicked agreement, the two sisters saw each other frequently, and consulted how they might disturb and interrupt the happiness of the queen. They proposed a great many ways, but in deliberating about the manner of executing them, found so many difficulties that they durst not attempt them. In the meantime, with a detestable dissimulation, they often went together to make her visits, and every time showed her all the marks of affection they could devise, to persuade her how overjoyed they were to have a sister raised to so high a fortune. The queen, on her part, constantly received them with all the demonstrations of esteem they could expect from so near a relative. Some time after her marriage, the expected birth of an heir gave great joy to the queen and emperor, which was communicated to all the court, and spread throughout the empire.



## THE TALKING BIRD

Upon this news the two sisters came to pay their compliments, and proffered their services, desiring her, if not provided with nurses, to accept of them.

The queen said to them most obligingly: "Sisters, I should desire nothing more, if it were in my power to make the choice. I am, however, obliged to you for your goodwill, but must submit to what the emperor shall order on this occasion. Let your husbands employ their friends to make interest, and get some courtier to ask this favour of his majesty, and if he speaks to me about it, be assured that I shall not only express the pleasure he does me but thank him for making choice of you."

The two husbands applied themselves to some courtiers, their patrons, and begged of them to use their interest to procure their wives the honour they aspired to. Those patrons exerted themselves so much in their behalf that the emperor promised them to consider of the matter, and was as good as his word; for in conversation with the queen he told her that he thought her sisters were the most proper persons to be about her, but would not name them before he had asked her consent. The queen, sensible of the deference the emperor so obligingly paid her, said to him, "Sir, I was prepared to do as your majesty might please to command. But since you have been so kind as to think of my sisters, I thank you for the regard you have shown them for my sake, and therefore I shall not dissemble that I had rather have them than strangers." The emperor therefore named the queen's two sisters to be her attendants; and from that time they went frequently to the palace, overjoyed at the opportunity they would have of executing the detestable wickedness they had meditated against the queen.

Shortly afterward a young prince, as bright as the day, was born to the queen; but neither his innocence nor beauty could