

## Are the “Arabian Nights” All Fiction?



*The Arabian Nights - The Djinn by girlinthebigbox*

For many years it has been customary to regard that collection of interesting stories called “The Arabian Nights,” as pure fiction arising out of Oriental brains at a time when every ruler had his story-teller to amuse him or put him to sleep. But many a man who has down in his heart believed in the stories he heard in his youth about fairies and ghosts, has felt a revival of his young fancies upon perusing these tales of prodigies and magic. Others, however, have laughed at them as pure fables, and the entire scientific world does nothing but preserve contemptuous silence.

The question here to be answered by men of science is how did such ideas arise? Taking them on their own ground, one must believe that with so much smoke there must at one time have been some fire. Just as the prevalence of a myth – such as the Devil or Serpent myth – over large numbers of people or vast periods of time points to the fact that there must have been something, whatever it was, that gave rise to the idea.

In this enquiry our minds range over that portion of the world which is near the Red Sea, Arabia and Persia, and we are brought very close to places, now covered with water, that

once formed part of ancient Lemuria. The name Red Sea may have arisen from the fact that it was believed really to cover hell: and its lower entrance at the island of Perim is called “Babel Mandeb,” or “the Gate of Hell.” This Red Sea plays a prominent part in the Arabian Nights tales and has some significance. We should also recollect that Arabia once had her men of science, the mark of whose minds has not yet been effaced from our own age. These men were many of them magicians, and they learned their lore either from the Lemurian adepts, or from the Black Magicians of the other famous land of Atlantis.

We may safely conclude that the Arabian Nights stories are not all pure fiction but are the faint reverberations of a louder echo which reached their authors from the times of Lemuria and Atlantis.

Solomon is now and then mentioned in them, and Solomon, wherever he was, has always been reckoned as a great adept. The Jewish Cabala and Talmud speak of Solomon with great reverence. His power and the power of his seal – the interlaced triangles – constantly crop up among the other magical processes adverted to in these tales. And in nearly all cases where he is represented as dealing with wicked genii, he buried them in the Red Sea. Now if Solomon was a Jewish King far away in Palestine, how did he get down to the Red Sea, and where is there any mention made of his travelling at all? These genii were elemental spirits, and Solomon is merely a name standing for the vast knowledge of magic arts possessed by adepts at a time buried in the darkness of the past. In one tale, a fisherman hauls up a heavy load, which turns out to be a large *iron* pot, with a metal cover, on which was engraved Solomon’s Seal. The unlucky man opened the pot, when at once a vapour rose out of it that spread itself over the whole heavens at first, and then condensed again into a monstrous form

who addressed the fisherman saying, that ages before he had been confined there by Solomon; that after two hundred years he swore he would make rich the man lucky enough to let him out; after five hundred years that he would reward his liberator with power; but after one thousand years of captivity he would kill the one who should free him. Then he ordered the man to prepare for death. The fisherman, however, said he doubted that the genii had really been in the pot as he was too large. To prove that he had been, the spirit immediately assumed the vaporous condition and slowly with spiral motion sank into the iron pot again, when at once the fisherman clapped on the cover and was about to cast him back into the sea. The djinn then begged for mercy and agreed to serve the man and not to kill him, whereupon he was released.

Many persons will laugh at this story. But no one who has seen the wonders of spiritualism, or who knows that at this day there are many persons in India, as well as elsewhere who have dealings with elemental spirits that bring them objects instantaneously, &c., will laugh before reflecting on the circumstances.

Observe that the pot in which he was confined was made of metal, and that the talismanic seal was on the cover. The metal prevented him from making magnetic connection for the purpose of escaping, and the seal on the cover barred that way. There were no marks on the sides of the pot. His spreading himself into a vast vapour shows that he was one of the elementals of the airy kingdom – the most powerful and malignant; and his malignancy is shown in the mean, ungrateful oath he took to destroy whomsoever should be his liberator. His spreading into vapour, instead of at once springing out of the pot, refers to his invisibility, for we see that in order to enter it he was compelled to assume his vaporous state, in which he again put himself into the pot.

In another story we see a young man visiting an elemental of the nature of a Succubus, who permits him now and then to go out and perform wonders. But the entrance to her retreat is unseen and kept invisible to others. In India there are those who are foolish enough to make magnetic connection with elementals of this class, by means of processes which we will not detail here. The elemental will then at your wish instantaneously produce any article which the operator may have touched, no matter how far away it may be or how tightly locked up. The consequences of this uncanny partnership are very injurious to the human partner. The records of spiritualism in America will give other cases of almost like character, sufficient to show that a compact can be entered into between a human being and an intelligence or force outside of our sensuous perceptions.

In other stories various people have power over men and animals and the forces of nature. They change men into animals and do other wonders. When they wish to cause the metamorphosis, they dash a handful of water into the unfortunate's face, crying; "Quit that form of man and assume the form of a dog." The terrible Maugraby is a Black Magician, such as can now be found in Bhootan, who had changed many persons, and the story of his destruction shows that his life and power as well as his death lay in the nasty practices of Black Magic. When the figure and the talisman were destroyed, he was also. The white magician has no talisman but his Atman, and as that cannot be destroyed, he is beyond all fear.

But this paper is already too long. We are not forcing a conclusion when we say that these admirable and amusing tales are not *all* fiction. There is much nonsense in them, but they have come to us from the very land – now bleak and desolate – where at one time the fourth race men held sway and dabbled in both White and Black Magic.

*William Q. Judge*

*from WQJ Pamphlet #18 "Wisdom From The Past" and William Q. Judge Theosophical Articles Vol. 2*

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### Excerpt from 'Light of the Dark Ages'

(...)

In the last quarter of the sixth century occurred an event which was destined to change the history not only of Europe, but of the whole world. One summer day in the year 581, a caravan of camels laden with the costly products of southern Arabia appeared in the little town of Busra. The leader of the caravan was accompanied by a boy who was the nephew of the guardian of the *Caaba*, the sacred Temple of the Arabs in Mecca. The boy's name was Mohammed. During his stay in Busra Mohammed was entertained in the Nestorian monastery. He had many conversations with the monks and became deeply interested in their religious and philosophical views, particularly in their aversion to idolatry and their revolt against the carnalized Trinity of the orthodox Christian Church. As Mohammed grew to manhood he came more and more under the influence of the Nestorians. Finally he retired to a grotto and gave himself up to meditation. From this silent communication with his own thoughts one conviction was born: *the Unity of God*. He then left his retreat, determined to devote his whole life to the promulgation of that one truth. By the end of six years he had gained only 1500 converts. But when he departed from Medina on his last pilgrimage to Mecca, he was accompanied by 114,000 followers. The religion of Islam has now approximately 200,000,000 believers.

Like Jesus and the Buddha before him, Mohammed had no intention of founding a new religion. His purpose was to reform Christianity and Judaism, to destroy the sectarianism and idolatry into which these two religions had fallen. For many centuries the Muslims considered their religion merely as an offshoot of Nestorianism. Not until it had become intoxicated with its own success did Islam repudiate the original intentions of its founder and assert itself as a distinct revelation.

There was, however, one striking difference between Christianity and Mohammedanism which appeared at the very beginning of both religions and continued without interruption for many centuries. Where the Christians denounced learning, the Mohammedans encouraged it. Where the Christians destroyed libraries and universities, the Mohammedans built them. Within twenty-five years after the death of Mohammed, intellectual development had become a settled principle in the system of Islam. Ali, the son-in-law of Mohammed, became a patron of arts and sciences and devoted himself to the pursuit of knowledge. When the seat of government was removed to Baghdad, a new era of intellectual development arose which had ultimately a profound influence on the whole of Europe. The first Khalif of Baghdad was a devoted student of the sciences who established many colleges of medicine and law. When Haroun-al-Raschid (hero of the *Arabian Nights*) came into power he ordered a school to be attached to every mosque built. He never traveled without his retinue of a hundred scholars. Sir Mark Sykes gives us an illuminating picture of Mohammedan culture under his reign:

The Imperial Court was polished, luxurious and wealthy. Every department of state had a properly regulated and well-ordered public office. Schools and colleges abounded. Philosophers, students, doctors, poets and theologians flocked to Baghdad from all parts of the civilized globe. (*The Caliph's Last Message.*)

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## Excerpt from 'The Druzes of Mount Lebanon'

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Although Europe is indebted to its Mohammedan conquerors for many of its physical comforts, its real debt to Islam is intellectual. From the seventh to the thirteenth centuries it was the Arabs and the Jews, and they alone, who kept the torch of knowledge burning. The Mohammedans encouraged intellectual pursuits, allowed freedom of thought and religious liberty, and welcomed all scholars into their midst, irrespective of their religion, colour or race.

Theosophists feel particularly grateful to one Mohammedan and one Jew whose efforts in the tenth and eleventh centuries resuscitated the Hermetic and Neoplatonic philosophies in Europe and brought the Kabala to the attention of the Western world. The Hermetic philosophy and Alchemy were re-introduced into Europe by Avicenna, the famous pupil of Al-Ferabi. He was born in Bokhara in 937 and at the age of ten he had memorized the entire Koran. At eighteen he was an accomplished physician and philosopher, and at twenty-one he wrote an encyclopaedia of all sciences except mathematics. He was equally famed as a geologist and a poet, some of his biographers claiming that it was Avicenna who was the real author of the quatrains of Omar Khayyam. He founded the Graeco-Arabian School of Medicine and his works were still being studied in the European Universities as late as 1650. To this day his portrait adorns the diploma of the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain. Like many other Arab physicians, Avicenna used his knowledge of correspondences (which forms the basis of the Hermetic philosophy) in his treatment of disease. He traced many diseases back to the *inner* principles and made a special study of the influences of the mother's imagination upon the unborn child. He is also said to have possessed the knowledge which allowed him to retain his physical body long beyond the average term of years. The *Theosophical Glossary* repeats the legend that "owing to his knowledge of the Elixir of Life he still lives as an Adept who will disclose himself to the profane at the end of a certain cycle."

Ibn Gebirol, known to the Medieval Scholastics as Avicebron, formed an important link in the Neoplatonic succession, since it was through him that Neoplatonism, long exiled, returned to Europe. His parents were Spanish Jews and Ibn Gebirol spoke Arabic and Hebrew with equal facility from his earliest youth. In a poem written in his sixteenth year he declares: "From my youth have I labored in the cause of wisdom, for her goal is joy-engendering." His writings fall into two classes: (1) his poems, always written in Hebrew for the purpose of expounding Kabalistic doctrines, and (2) his prose, always written in Arabic, containing expressions of Neoplatonic philosophy. He wrote over three hundred poems, some of which have been incorporated into the Liturgy of the Spanish Jews. Of his twenty philosophical works only two remain, the most important being his *Fons Vitae*, or *Fountain of Life*. This is written in the form of a dialogue between Master and disciple, and the influence of Plotinus can be traced throughout its pages. In regard to the First Principle, Avicebron wrote: "To ascend to the First Supreme Substance is impossible, but it is possible, though difficult, to ascend to That Which is nearest to this Substance." (v:55.) The Universe, he says, is an emanation of this First Supreme Substance, which becomes more perceptible to sense as it descends the ladder of being. "The nearer the form is to the First Supreme Substance the more intangible and unapparent it is; while the nearer it is to the corporeal form, the more dense and visible it is." (v:26.) Like all true philosophers, Avicebron declares that the first object of man's search should be knowledge: "The knowledge which should above all be sought is the knowledge of himself. At the same time he should seek to know the Final Cause through Which he is, because the existence of man has a Final Cause." (v:1.)

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### From 'Elementals and Elementaries'

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Elementaries are not all bad, but, in a general sense, they are not good. They are shells, no doubt of that. Well, they have much automatic and seemingly intelligent action left if they are those of strongly material people who died attached to the things of life. If of people of an opposite character, they are not so strong. Then there is a class which are really not dead, such as suicides, and sudden deaths, and highly wicked people. They are powerful. Elementals enter into all of them, and thus get a fictitious personality and intelligence wholly the property of the shell. They galvanize the shell into action, and by its means can see and hear as if beings themselves, like us. The shells are, in this case, just like a sleepwalking human body. They will through habit exhibit the advancement they got while in the flesh. Some people, you know, do not impart to their bodily molecules the habit of their minds to as great extent as others. We thus see why the utterances of these so-called "spirits" are never ahead of the highest point of progress attained by living human beings, and why they take up the ideas elaborated day-by-day by their votaries. This seance worship is what was called in Old India the worship of the Pretas and Bhuts and Pisachas and Gandharvas.

I do not think any elementary capable of motive had ever any other than a bad one; the rest are nothing, they have no motive and are only the shades refused passage by Charon.

(...)

*William Q. Judge, Pamphlet #9 "Conversations on Occultism I" and Theosophical Articles Vol. 1*

### From 'Elementals—Karma'

The elemental world has become a strong factor in the Karma of the human race. Being unconscious, automatic, and photographic, it assumes the complexion of the human family itself. In the earlier ages, when we may postulate that man had not yet begun to make bad Karma, the elemental world was more friendly to man because it had not received unfriendly impressions. But so soon as man began to become ignorant, unfriendly to himself and the rest of creation, the elemental world began to take on exactly the same complexion and return to humanity the exact pay, so to speak, due for the actions of humanity. Or, like a donkey, which, when he is pushed against, will push against you. Or, as a human being, when anger or insult is offered, feels inclined to return the same. So the elemental world, being unconscious force, returns or reacts upon humanity exactly as humanity acted towards it, whether the actions of men were done with the knowledge of these laws or not. So in these times it has come to be that the elemental world has the complexion and action which is the exact result of all the actions and thoughts and desires of men from the earliest times. And, being unconscious and only acting according to the natural laws of its being, the elemental world is a powerful factor in the workings of Karma. And so long as mankind does not cultivate brotherly feeling and charity towards the whole of creation, just so long will the elementals be without the impulse to act for our benefit. But so soon and wherever man or men begin to cultivate brotherly feeling and love for the whole of creation, there and then the elementals begin to take on the new condition.

*William Q. Judge, ibid.*

## Madame Blavatsky on Elementals

For whether one calls the genii of Hermes and his "Gods," "Powers of Darkness" and "Angels," as in the Greek and Latin Churches; or "Spirits of the Dead," as in Spiritualism or, again, Bhoots and Devas, Shaitan or Djinn, as they are still called in India and Mussulman countries—they are all one and the same thing —ILLUSION. Let not this, however, be misunderstood in the sense into which the great philosophical doctrine of the Vedantists has been lately perverted by Western schools.

All that which is, emanates from the ABSOLUTE, which, from this qualification alone, stands as the one and only reality—hence, everything extraneous to this Absolute, the generative and causative Element, must be an illusion, most undeniably. But this is only so from the purely metaphysical view. A man who regards himself as mentally sane, and is so regarded by his neighbours, calls the visions of an insane brother— whose hallucinations make the victim either happy or supremely wretched, as the case may be—illusions and fancies likewise. But, where is that madman for whom the hideous shadows in his deranged mind, his illusions, are not, for the time being, as actual and as real as the things which his physician or keeper may see? Everything is relative in this Universe; everything is an illusion. But the experience of any plane is an actuality for the percipient being, whose consciousness is on that plane; though the said experience, regarded from the purely metaphysical standpoint, may be conceived to have no objective reality. But it is not against metaphysicians, but against physicists and materialists that Esoteric teachings have to fight, and for these Vital Force, Light, Sound, Electricity, even to the objectively pulling force of magnetism, have no objective being, and are said to exist merely as "modes of motion," "sensations and affections of matter."

*THE SECRET DOCTRINE, 1:295*

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*For further quotations on Islamic Golden Age see*

<https://universaltheosophy.com/legacy/movements/western-transmission/arabic-golden-age/>



*Medieval Arabic city - the Market  
by Hetman80 on DeviantArt*