

THE BOOK OF SINDIBAD

PREFACE.

The present work is, I believe, the first attempt, in this country, to furnish a compendious account of the Eastern and Western groups of romances known respectively under their generic titles of the BOOK OF SINDIBĀD and the BOOK OF THE SEVEN WISE MASTERS. Wright's introduction to his edition, for the Percy Society, of an Early English metrical version of the *Seven Sages* may perhaps be considered as such a work, but he has confounded the Eastern with the Western versions, having been misled by Des Longchamps and other investigators, who, in this field of inquiry, according to Gödeke, "fell into such confusion in essential points that they contributed almost as much to perpetuate old errors and spread them anew as to lay and root out others." Moreover, several important texts have been since discovered, throwing new light upon the history of both groups. Professor Comparetti's *Ricerche intorno al Libro di Sindibād*, an English translation of which, by Mr. H. C. Coote, forms one of the publications for the Folk-Lore Society, is undoubtedly one of the most important contributions to the history of the romance; but it assumes the reader to be familiar with the details of the several Eastern texts, the subordinate stories being mostly referred to only by their titles, and its usefulness is consequently confined within a narrow circle, in the absence, for merely English readers, of the tales themselves. This want I have now endeavoured to supply, to the best of my ability, in the following work, which comprises:

(1) An introductory account of the structure of the Book of Sindibād, and the probable sources of the several Eastern versions; to which is prefixed a Comparative Table of the Tales in this group, designed to exhibit, at a glance, the degrees of relationship which the texts bear towards each other.

(2) An epitome, by Professor Forbes Falconer, of a Persian text, entitled *Sindibād Nāma*, composed in 1375, of which the only known copy is an imperfect MS. in the Library of the India Office. Falconer's work left much to be desired: of some of the Tales he gave only the titles, and others he presented in a very abridged form; it has therefore been compared with the MS.; the abridged and omitted Tales—ten in number, of which three seem to have altogether escaped his notice—translated and inserted, and several grave errors rectified. In footnotes I have explained such references and expressions as might be obscure to some readers, and adduced from the other versions passages which correspond with, or vary from, this text.

(3) An Arabian version of the *Seven Vazīrs*, translated by Jonathan Scott, with corrections and additions, and similarly annotated. In my preface to it are some particulars regarding this and other Arabian texts.

(4) An Appendix, which contains variants of the Tales in both these texts

forming curious illustrations of the pedigree of popular fictions and their migrations and transformations together with such Tales as do not occur in them, but are found in the others. Thus all the Tales of the Eastern Texts, as represented in the Comparative Table, are now brought together.

It certainly formed no part of my original design to treat of the Western Texts. These have, in some measure, preserved— from oral tradition, unquestionably the leading ideas of the ancient original tale: the orphanhood of the accused youth; his education at a distance from his father; his step-mother's malice against him, and so on;— but, as Comparetti has observed, "there is no Eastern version which differs so much from the others as the whole Western group differs from the Eastern group, whether it be in the form of the fundamental story, or in the tales inserted in it, of which scarcely four are common to both groups." As my work progressed, however, it occurred to me that abstracts of an Early English metrical version of the *Seven Wise Masters* and of the oldest European form of the romance, the Latin original of the old French metrical version, *Dolopathos* discovered within recent years— with variants as found in other collections, would be acceptable to English students of the history of Fiction, which I have accordingly inserted in the Appendix.

My work is, of course, not free from errors: I trust they will be excused by those who know the difficulties that beset a task of this kind. But however imperfect it may be, it would certainly have been still more so, but for the valuable assistance which I received from several eminent scholars; especially, from Mr. J. W. Redhouse, on whose stores of learning I drew, as on former occasions, perhaps too frequently; Mr. William Flatt, to whose erudition I am also much indebted; Mr. E. J. W. Gibb, author of *Ottoman Poems*, etc., whose great kindness of disposition is equalled by his attainments in, and enthusiasm for, Oriental literature; and to Mr. David Ross, Principal of the E.G. Training College, Glasgow, of whose classical and general scholarship I was also happily able to avail myself. That the work should be as comprehensive as possible has been my aim from the first; and, notwithstanding occasional inaccuracies and shortcomings, I venture to hope that it will prove interesting to general readers, and possibly even not altogether without its use to some of those who make a special study of the origin and spread of "old-world tales."

W. A. CLOUSTON

GLASGOW, *May*, 1884.



[Home](#)

[Next](#)

Prepared for www.wollamshram.ca/1001/Clouston/Sindibad_Main.htm
© 2009 (090214)