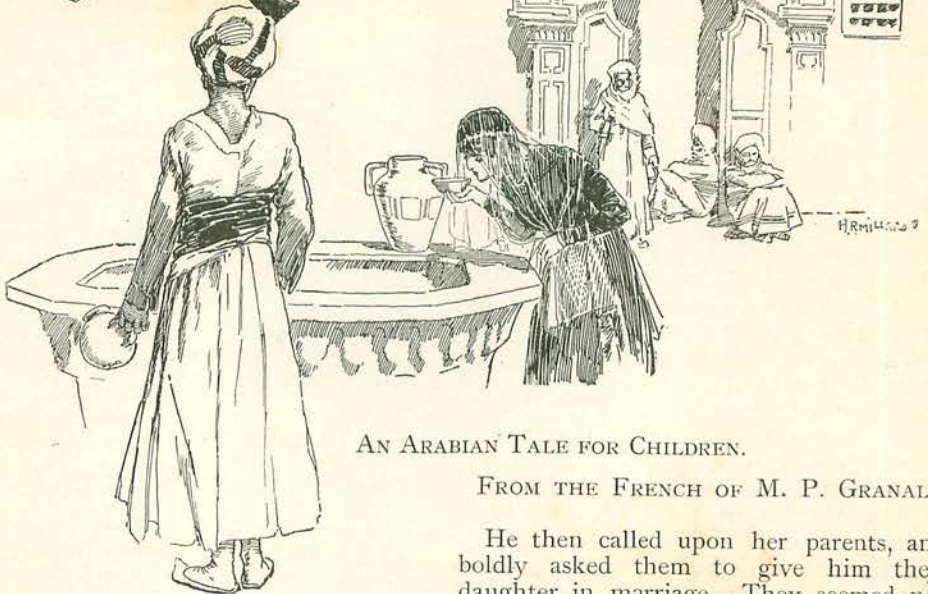


Rajeb's Reward.



AN ARABIAN TALE FOR CHILDREN.

FROM THE FRENCH OF M. P. GRANAL.

RAJEB was a youth of Cairo, who had inherited from his father a fortune of about two thousand piastres. Had he invested his little capital in trade, and had he been industrious, he might have done very well; but shortly after his father's death he must needs fall in love with a beautiful girl, and then he could think of nothing else. He had met the maiden accidentally at the fountain of a mosque, and she had drawn aside her veil for a moment in order to drink. She was plainly dressed, and appeared to belong to some humble but respectable family. As soon as she became aware of the young man's admiring gaze she replaced her veil with modest haste, and hurried away, not once looking backward over her shoulder, which showed that she was no coquette. Rajeb followed her and saw her enter a small house, of the kind occupied by middle-class folk. He had fallen in love at first sight, and lost no time in making inquiries concerning his enchantress. He could learn no more of her, however, than the fact that she was as good as she was beautiful.

He then called upon her parents, and boldly asked them to give him their daughter in marriage. They seemed not averse to the match, but when the subject of her dowry was discussed, he was astounded to hear that they demanded of their daughter's husband no less than five thousand piastres. In vain the disconcerted lover protested that such a sum was beyond his means; he was told that he must either pay the money or lose the girl. As the latter alternative was intolerable, he begged that they would allow him a few days' delay. This request was granted, but if, said the parents, he did not appear within the appointed time, they should consider themselves at liberty to accept other proposals.

Rajeb, as he returned to his home, reproached himself for having idled away his past time. "Ah!" he said to himself, "if only I had worked hard, I might now have been rich enough to purchase my happiness!" He took out his money and counted it again and again, but no amount of counting or of wishing would make it more than two thousand piastres. He went to bed, but could not sleep for thinking of possible and impossible ways and means of procuring the rest of the money. At last a plan that seemed feasible presented itself

to his mind. There lived at Tantah an old uncle, whom he had not seen for eighteen years, and who was said to be rich. "I will look him up," thought Rajeb, "and beg of him to lend me the three thousand piastres; he will not, surely, refuse!" And he longed for the day, that he might set out upon this hopeful quest.

Morning dawned at length, and Rajeb started on his journey. In order both to *be* and to *appear* economical, he walked all the way. Just as he reached the first houses of Tantah, he met some boys, of whom he inquired for his uncle, "the rich Jousoff." "The rich Jousoff!" echoed they, in derision; "say, rather, 'the beggarly old miser Jousoff,' who hates to fling away a bone after he has picked it clean."

At these words the youth's heart sank within him. However, he asked one of the lads to take him to his uncle's house. There he beheld a withered, ragged, dirty old man, who saluted him roughly with—

"What do you want?"

"Oh, dear uncle!" exclaimed Rajeb; "do you not remember me? I am your sister's son, Rajeb—little Rajeb, whom you used to love. I have come to see you. How are you, dear uncle?"

"Oh, I'm quite well," said the old man; "quite well, but very poor. I shall be unable to offer you very splendid hospitality."

"What of that?" returned Rajeb, cheerfully. "Both riches and poverty come from heaven."

Thus conversing, they entered Jousoff's room, which was exceedingly dark and dingy, and contained no furniture but an old mat and a jar of water. Neither pipes nor coffee

were to be seen. Rajeb, however, was good-humoured and apparently contented. The two supped that evening upon a morsel of detestable cheese and some crusts of coarse, black bread. The cheese was an unusual luxury, procured especially for the occasion, and the neighbours who saw the old man go out and buy it could scarcely believe their eyes.

Rajeb was not accustomed to rich fare, but after his toilsome journey he really stood in need of a good substantial supper. When the meagre meal was ended, he tried to guide the conversation into a channel suitable for the introduction of his request. The old man quickly understood his hints. Anticipating his

purpose, he cried, "I am a beggar! No dervish is poorer than I! All the world robs me. I have spent my last para upon a supper for you. I am ruined!" By glowing descriptions of the girl's beauty and his own passion of love for her, Rajeb strove in vain to soften the miser's heart. Finding



"I AM LITTLE RAJEB."



"THE TWO SUPPED ON DETESTABLE CHEESE AND BLACK BREAD."

that he could make no impression upon that stony organ, he rose at length, and, muttering something about needing a breath of fresh air, went out to conceal his intense disappointment and chagrin.

Outside the house, a lean ass was lying in a small shed munching some miserable scraps of straw. Rajeb, who loved animals, pitied the poor, starved creature; and, after caressing him, went to a shop and bought some barley, which he gave him, together with a drink of water. After that, he returned to his uncle's house, in which he spent a most uncomfortable night, lying upon the floor. In the morning, after another wretched repast, the nephew was about to take his leave when Jousoff remarked: "I have an ass which is of no use to me. It is all the property left to me, and if you like you may—accompany me to the market, and see me sell it." Rajeb agreed to the proposal, and they went together to the ass's stall. The young man bestowed another caress upon the poor animal, which looked at him with strangely meaning-full eyes, and struck the ground with his foot several times. He seemed to Rajeb to say, "Buy me."

All the way to the market, our hero was debating within himself as to whether or no he should buy the ass, in answer to his mute appeal. Something—he knew not what, unless it were a feeling of compassion—strongly impelled him to do so. When the little party had reached their destination, several would-be purchasers presented themselves, for the animal was young and had no other fault than the skinniness produced by starvation. One said he would give two hundred piastres, another offered three hundred, another five hundred. Rajeb, perceiving that his uncle was willing to take the last-named sum, offered a few piastres more, making sure that he should now get the ass.

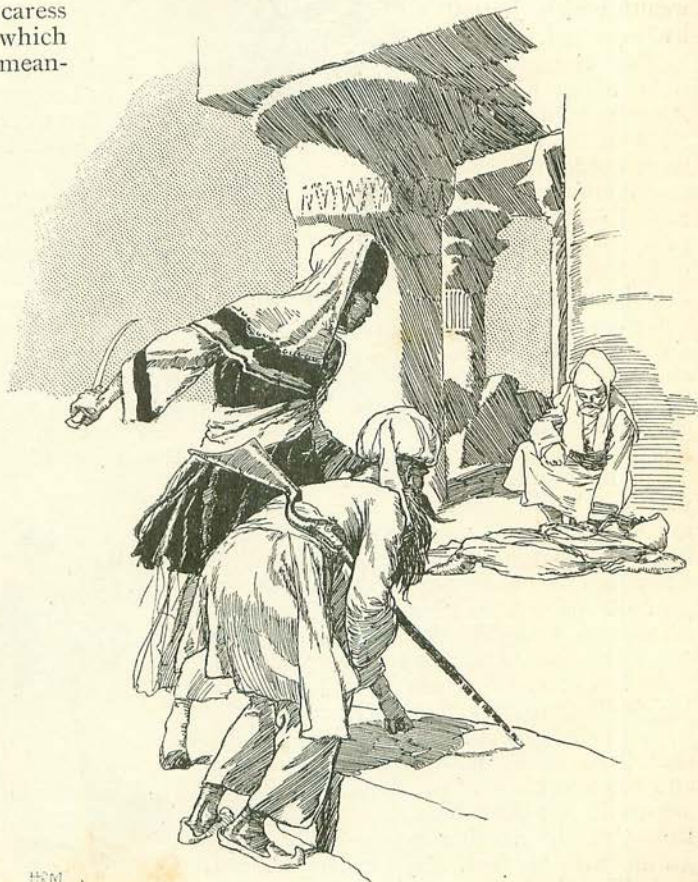
"What on earth do *you* want with the beast?" inquired his avaricious relative.

"I am resolved to possess it," replied Rajeb.

"Well, then," said the old man, with a greedy look, "give me a thousand piastres, and it shall be yours."

And, as by this time the youth felt that at any cost (although he knew not why) he *must* have the ass, he agreed at length even to this exorbitant demand; the bargain was concluded.

As nearly all Rajeb's money was at Cairo, he invited his uncle to accompany him thither, in order to get his piastres. Since he had changed masters, the ass seemed a different creature, and fairly danced to the city. There Rajeb duly handed over to his uncle the stipulated sum, and entertained him very hospitably for a few days, after which Jousoff said farewell, and departed to his own home.



"SLAIN BY HIGHWAY ROBBERS."

His nephew at once set to work making a stall for his new possession, which enjoyed now an abundance of food and careful tending. Meanwhile, the poor old miser, homeward-bound, had been attacked, plundered, and slain by highway robbers. When the news reached the ears of kind-hearted Rajeb, he shed a tear over his uncle's sad fate, and set off again for Tantah. He was next-of-kin to the dead man, but with the remembrance of his recent visit fresh in his mind, he did not expect to reap much benefit from his heirship, notwithstanding the reputation for wealth which Jousoff had acquired.

This time, Rajeb rode upon his ass. After putting up his steed in his old stall, he proceeded to search the house. In that miserable hovel, not a para, not a single thing of any value, was to be found. All the time that Rajeb was examining the premises, the ass whined and brayed. Thinking he needed food and drink, his master went out several times, and fetched him straw, water, and barley; but they lay untouched, and the animal continually stamped with his foot upon the floor of the stall.

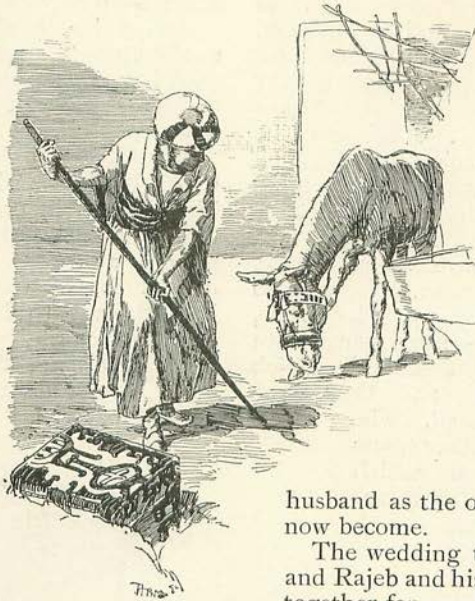
An idea occurred to Rajeb. "Why do you do that?" said he, whereupon the ass stamped still more vigorously than before. His master, seizing a rusty iron bar which lay near, began to turn up the ground, the ass looking on with evident pleasure and satisfaction, his wonderfully expressive eyes seeming to say: "That is right! Go on; it is there." And presently, Rajeb discovered a coffer! When he opened it, he found, to his unspeakable delight, that it was filled with doubloons, sequins, and precious coins of every sort. Still the ass would not allow him to rest. Again—this time in another spot—he beat the ground with his foot. Rajeb eagerly obeyed, and his digging soon brought to light

another coffer, full of rubies, pearls, emeralds, and other magnificent gems. The ass appeared now perfectly satisfied, and stamped no more.

Upon the back of the willing beast, the treasure—a heavy load—was quickly carried to Cairo. Rajeb hastened to his lady's house, and was just in time to prevent her marriage with an old Turk who had agreed to give the five thousand piastres demanded by her parents. Rajeb had only to exhibit to the father a very small part of his acquisition in order to induce him to break off the projected match, and bestow his daughter upon such a highly desirable

husband as the once rejected suitor had now become.

The wedding took place immediately, and Rajeb and his wife lived most happily together for many years. The ass which had brought such good fortune was treated always as a dear friend, and the only task imposed upon him was that of sometimes carrying his mistress and her children. Everyone loved and petted him, and he lived in clover until the end of his days.



"AGAIN HE BEAT THE GROUND WITH HIS FOOT."

