

NOTE BY THE EDITOR OF THE SERIES.

The Story of "*A-lad'-din, or the Wonderful Lamp*," is one of the most interesting of the tales in the "*ARABIAN NIGHTS*." As this little book is intended for very young readers, the tale has been entirely re-written for this series, and much simplified; but nothing is omitted that is necessary to the complete understanding of the story.

The "*Arabian Nights' Entertainments*," or "*A Thousand and One Nights*," as the Arabic name means, is a collection of tales of Eastern life (especially Mohammedan), which are very ancient. The collection, much in the form in which we have it now, was probably written out (in Arabic) at Cairo, about 1450. The tales plainly show their origin, some of them being Persian, others Indian, a few Egyptian, and a large number Arabian.

The Tales were first made known to European readers by Antoine Galland, who published them in French, between 1704 and 1717. His translation is very inaccurate, and does not well represent the original; but nearly all the English editions are made from Galland's. In 1840, Mr. E. W. Lane published the most scholarly translation (with many notes explanatory of manners and customs) that has yet appeared. Sir Richard Burton published an almost word for word translation between 1885 and 1887, and in 1888 Lady Burton issued an edition of her husband's work "prepared for household reading," but it is not at all suitable for children's use.

These tales divide themselves roughly into two classes—(1) Those that are to a certain extent historical; and (2) those that are full of "wonderful and impossible adventures," or those in which Genii and magical powers assist the personages whose story is being told. Of this latter class is "*Aladdin*."

In past years (as well as at the present day), these, and similar tales, were told at the street corners and market-places in Eastern cities, by Arab Story-tellers, to the crowd which quickly gathered round them. The more wonderful the tale, the quicker the coppers were thrown to the Story-teller. All the tales in the "*Arabian Nights*," even the most probable ones, are full of mistakes, though generally they portray manners and customs with great accuracy. For instance, in "*Aladdin*," the incidents of Aladdin and the Princess going to the baths could never have occurred in China, for the Chinese are not (and were not), like the Mohammedans, a bathing people. In the original also, the Emperor is called "*Sultan*," but there never was a Sultan of China. It is this oral transmission of the tales that accounts for many incongruities and mistakes; but we in Europe experience the same thing, for all our histories of St. George, Prince Arthur, and many other historical personages, are from oral tradition only, and were carried from place to place by the Bards and Minstrels in England, and the Troubadours in France, up to the period of the Middle Ages and the invention of Printing, and even long after.—A.G.