

FOR EVERY BOY AND GIRL



By Charles Lobe Benjamin.

A Daniel come to Judgment! yea, a Daniel!

Shakespeare

THE Gate of the Caravans opens upon a grove of palm-trees. Beyond is the desert, stretching away past eye-shot, and gleaming like burnished brass in the fierce light of the tropic sun. Yusuf, the Arab boy who peddled dates, crouched in the shadow of the gateway, watching the approach of a caravan. The shrill cries of the camel-drivers came nearer and nearer, and presently a long line of laden dromedaries began to file through the open gate, slouching along with noiseless tread, and bobbing their long necks up and down to an accompaniment of complaining grunts. Some of the drivers tossed "luck-money" to the Arab boy, whom they noticed, as they passed, remembering the words of the prophet: "The good that ye shall give in alms shall redound unto yourselves."

which so many wonderful tales were told.

He wondered now, as he watched the camels file past, whether he would ever be able to earn enough to buy one of those great, grunting, silent-footed beasts. A driver had told him once that even the cheapest camel costs more than a hundred pieces of gold, and a really good one twice as much. The boy raised his hand to his turban, and felt the one gold coin that was tucked securely away in the lining. Just one! And he needed so many more! He picked up the coppers the men had flung him, wishing in his heart they were gold coins, too, and followed dejectedly in the wake of the camels, that could still be seen at the far end of the narrow street.

All at once, as he shuffled along, his bare foot struck against something in the dust of the roadway that gave forth a jingling sound. He stooped quickly, and picked up—a netted purse of green silk! Not a little slender purse, but a big, fat, bulging

hard to give the camel up), and started up the street. Who had lost the purse? He didn't know, but it seemed likely that it had been dropped by some one of the caravan. He would seek there first.

Before Yusuf could come up with the caravan, however, another actor appeared on the scene. This was the Crier, a tall, venerable Turk with a flaming turban and a flowing gown of figured India stuff. He carried a long staff, with which he struck the ground at every step, the better to emphasize his words.

"Hear ye! Hear ye! Hear ye! All honest people," he cried. "The merchant Ebn-Aziz hath lost a purse containing two hundred pieces of gold. He offers half as a reward to whomsoever shall return it to him. Better the half with honesty than the whole with deceit! Hath any found a purse—a purse containing two hundred pieces of gold?"

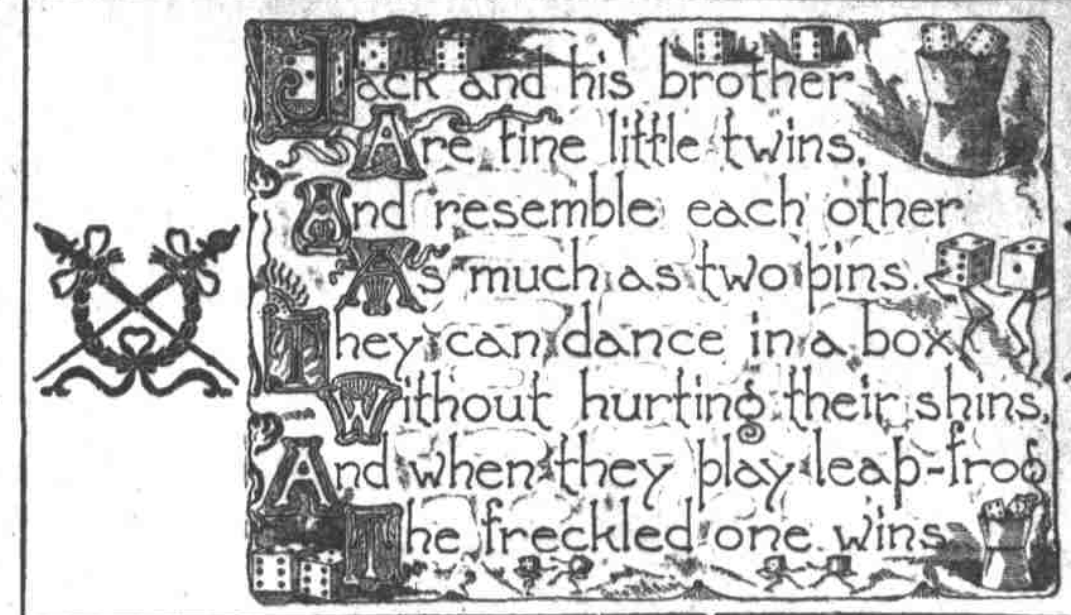
Yusuf interrupted the Crier. "I have found the purse," he said. He drew it forth from his bosom. "Here it is."

"Follow me," said the Crier, "and Ebn-Aziz will pay thee thy reward." A little crowd had gathered. Pushing his way through these people, the Crier started up the street, followed by Yusuf, the idlers trailing along behind. Some, however, ran ahead, eager to carry the news to Ebn-Aziz. As he passed up the street Yusuf heard his name uttered on all sides.

"Yusuf, the date seller, hath found the merchant Ebn-Aziz's purse," cried one.

"He will receive a hundred pieces of gold," said another.

"He is promised a hundred pieces," rejoined a third; "but if I know aught of the miser Ebn-Aziz, he will die before he will part with a single gold piece."



addressing the Crier.

"A purse containing two hundred pieces of gold."

"Was no mention made of an emerald?"

"None. The purse alone was named."

"Ebn-Aziz," said the Cadi, "if thy purse contained an emerald, as thou sayest, why didst thou not bid the Crier cry that also?"

The crowd murmured approval at this question, but the merchant was ready with an answer.

"Effendi," he said, "the emerald was of great size,

the purse, then, and but a moment before he swore he had not opened it."

The case, for a moment, looked brighter for the merchant.

"It is mine!" exclaimed Yusuf, passionately. "Thine?" rejoined Ebn. "What hath a beggar to do with gold? Doubtless thou wilt say the emerald is thine also, directly."

This taunt had the effect the merchant intended. The crowd began to think that perhaps, after all, Ebn-Aziz was right. The Cadi, too, was frowning on the boy. But the friend of Yusuf's father had not forsaken him.

"Effendi," he said, "the boy speaks truly. I myself gave him this gold piece but yesterday, in exchange for coppers, that he might with more ease and safety preserve his little hoard."

"Ebn-Aziz," said the Cadi, "how many gold pieces hast thou in thy purse?"

"I—I have not counted," faltered the merchant.

"Count them. Stay! Count so that I may see thee."

The merchant poured out the gold pieces before the Cadi, and began with trembling fingers to drop them back, one by one, into the purse. There were two hundred—not one missing!

The Cadi turned to one of the scribes who sat near, and dictated an order which the scribe engraved on the roll. Then, at a sign from the Cadi, the clerk rose, and, raising his hands to command silence, cried in a loud voice:

"In the name of Allah! In the name of Allah! In the name of Allah! Hear ye the judgment of the most just Cadi in the matter concerning the merchant Ebn-Aziz and the boy Yusuf."

The crowd pressed nearer to the divan. Ebn-Aziz glanced furtively at the Cadi, but his crafty eyes could find no trace of favor or displeasure in the judge's impassive face.

"Ebn-Aziz," said the Cadi, "listen attentively to me; for my decision in this case resteth on thy answer. Remember, too, that the reputation of this fatherless lad is at stake, and Allah, who watcheth over the orphan, hath said: 'Thou shalt not bear false witness.' Therefore, bethink thee before thou answerest. Art thou certain the purse thou lost contained an emerald?"

"As Allah is my judge," answered Ebn, "I am certain."

"Then," said the Cadi, "the matter is simple to decide—for I cannot doubt so solemn an assurance." The merchant bowed low at these words, the better to hide the exulting smile that distorted his crafty countenance.

"But neither," continued the Cadi, in an even voice, "can I doubt the word of the boy Yusuf, whose reputation for truth and honesty hath been established by many witnesses."

Ebn-Aziz straightened suddenly. The smile had disappeared.

"This, then, is my verdict," said the Cadi: "Since thy purse, Ebn-Aziz, contained an emerald, and since the purse that the boy Yusuf found contained no emerald, it is clear that it was not thy purse that the boy found. Therefore, I command that the purse be returned to the finder, Yusuf; and thee, Ebn-Aziz, I would advise to have thy loss again cried through the streets; perhaps thy emerald may yet be found."

A week later a string of laden camels filed out of the Gate of the Caravans and glided away into the desert. And with them went Yusuf, glad in the fulfillment of his dreams, as he strode proudly beside the handsomest camel (so Yusuf thought) in the world.



"PERHAPS THY EMERALD MAY BE FOUND."

Yusuf's heart sank at these words; but hope revived as one who had known his father called after him: "Well done, Yusuf! thou art an honest lad. I will go with thee and see that justice is done thee."

A walk of a few minutes brought them to the bazaar of Ebn-Aziz, who was indeed, as one of the speakers had said, a miserly fellow. He had learned a few minutes before that his purse had been found, and now he was cudgeling his evil brain for some excuse by which he might escape paying the promised reward. The sympathies of the crowd, however, were with the boy. Angry voices cried to the merchant: "Come, old money-grubber, here is thy purse; now give the lad his due."

"Softly, softly," croaked the miser. "All in good time, my friends. Let us first see that what was lost is found." He extended his hand for the purse. Yusuf handed it to him.

"Good!" said the merchant, as his fingers closed upon the gold. He glanced sharply at Yusuf from under his heavy brows. "He is only a lad," thought Ebn, "and poor. I shall have no difficulty in disposing of him." He opened the purse.

"Count out the money," cried the crowd. "Half for thyself, and half for the boy." The merchant thrust one bony hand into the purse and rummaged around among the coins.

"Ah, miserable wretch!" he exclaimed, with feigned emotion, "it is not here! Where is the emerald, boy? The emerald!"

"The emerald?" faltered Yusuf.

"Aye, the emerald!" shrieked Ebn, seizing him roughly by the shoulder and shaking him. "Think not to deceive me by such clumsy pretense. Thou returnest the gold, eh? Oh, paragon of honesty! But thou thinkest to keep the emerald, then—my precious emerald, that is worth ten times this paltry purse. Oh, unfortunate that I am! My emerald! My emerald! What hast thou done with it, thief—beggard?"

Yusuf shook himself free, and faced the old man, his eyes flashing.

"I am no thief," he cried, "and no beggar! I gave back thy purse to thee as I found it; I did not even open it. If it is thy mind to deny me the reward, keep thy gold; I will have none of it!" He turned on his heel.

"Go!" said Ebn, well satisfied with the success of his scheme, and he grateful to Allah that thou escapest so easily. I pardon thee for the sake of thy dead father, whose name I would not see disgraced."

But the Crier laid a detaining hand on the boy's shoulder. "Stop!" he cried. Then, turning to the merchant, he said: "What thou wilt pardon and what thou wilt not pardon is not for thee to say. This matter hath gone beyond thee. If the boy is honest he is entitled to the reward; if he be, as you say, a thief, as a thief he must be punished. Come both of ye with me before the Cadi."

"To the Cadi!" echoed the crowd. "To the Cadi!" Once arrived at the divan of the Cadi, the case was soon stated. Yusuf told how he had found the purse, and how he had returned it unopened to Ebn-Aziz. The merchant insisted that, besides the gold, the purse had contained an emerald of great value.

"What wast thou bidden to cry?" said the Cadi,



"MY EMERALD! MY EMERALD! WHAT HAST THOU DONE WITH IT, THIEF—BEGGAR?"

Perhaps, too, some of them felt genuine pity for the orphan lad, whose father had owned many camels, and had led many a richly laden caravan safely across the sandy wilderness, before he and his fortune were swept away in one of those terrible simoons, that, in a moment, rushing from no one knows whence, blinds, burns, and buries its victims, and sweeps on, no one knows whither.

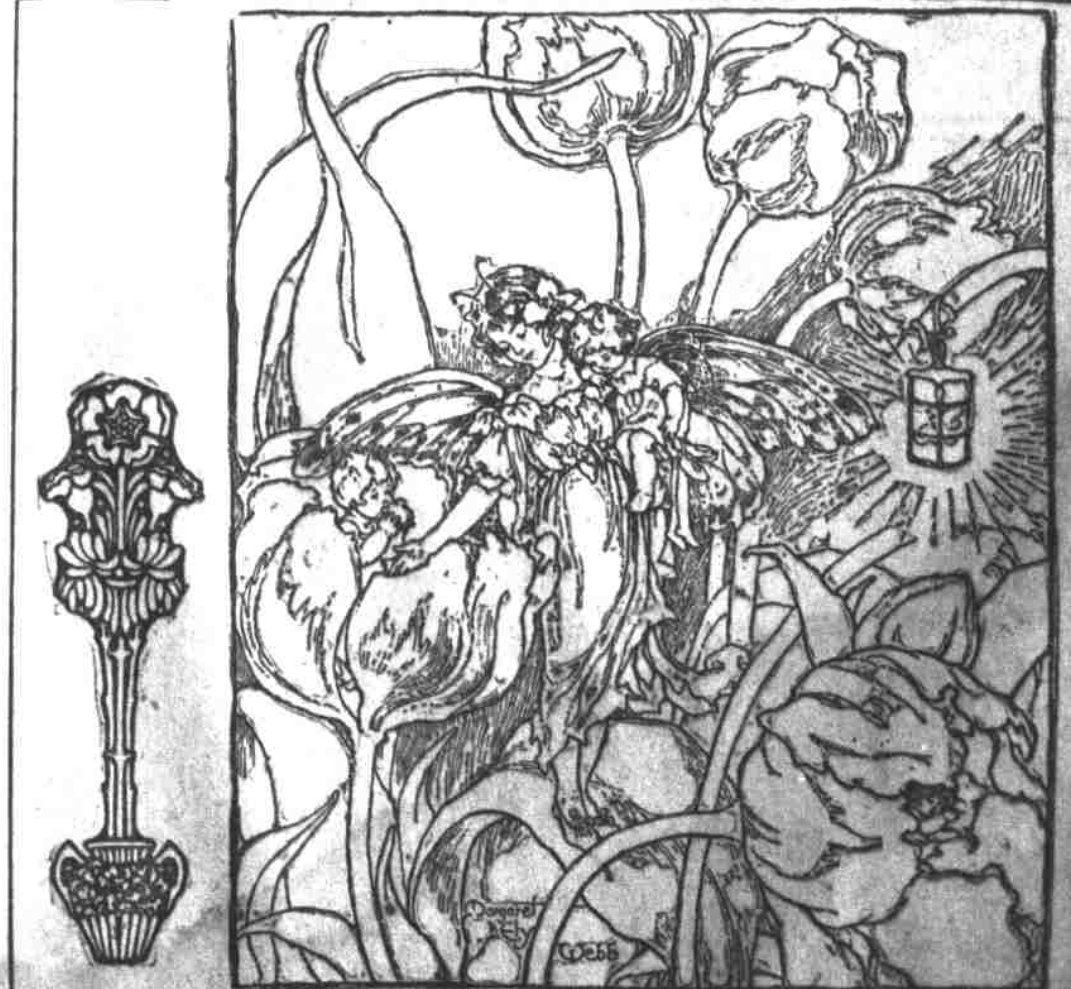
It was Yusuf's ambition to own a camel and travel with the caravans. The sailor's son loves the sea, though his father's bones lie bleaching at the bottom of it; and Yusuf yearned for the desert as only an Arab can, although he knew that somewhere in its treacherous sands his father's body lay. Every day, at noon, when the merchants closed their bazaars and retired for their midday nap, the little date-seller would wander off to the Gate of the Caravans, and gaze wistfully on that great sea of sand of

purse; and through its meshes the boy caught the glint of gold! Yusuf slipped the purse quickly into the bosom of his tunic. He glanced furtively around. The street was deserted. No one had seen him pick up the purse. No one need know he had found it unless he chose to tell. Need he tell? He slipped back to the shade of the gateway, and sat down to think.

He sat there, turning the matter over in his mind, a long, long while, his hand pressed over the spot where the purse lay. How heavy it was! He dared not take it out to count his treasure, but he knew by the weight of it that here was the price of his camel, and more. Need he tell?

Whenever perplexed by doubt as to what he should do, the orphan had always before had recourse to one magic question: "What would father have done?" Yusuf asked himself that question now, and answered it: "Seek for the owner!"

Yes; find the owner. That is what he must do. He rose (a little slowly, it is true, because it was



RED TIME IN FAIRY LAND