

# **THE BOOK OF RUSTEM**

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The Book of Rustem by E. M. Wilmot -Buxton

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**E. M. WILMOT -BUXTON**

**THE BOOK  
OF RUSTEM**



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"TOLD  
THROUGH  
THE  
AGES"  
• • •

## THE BOOK OF RUSTEM



*Fr.*

**Zal and Rudabeh**

# THE BOOK OF RUSTEM

RETOLD FROM THE SHAH NAMEH OF  
FIRDAUSI

BY

E. M. WILMOT-BUXTON

AUTHOR OF "BRITAIN LONG AGO" "THE MAKERS OF  
EUROPE" ETC.

*"The songs they sing of Rustem  
Fill all the past with light;  
If truth be in their music,  
He was a noble knight."*

SIR FRANCIS H. DOYLE

LONDON

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1907  
M.G.C.

## PREFACE

**M**OST of the boys and girls who read this book will, I expect, be familiar with the Stories of King Arthur which have already appeared in this series ; and they will also know, very probably, the stories from the Odyssey which make such stirring reading of the days of long ago. Now this book of Persian tales resembles these stories in one way. All three are what are called by grown-up people great "national epics" ; that is to say, they tell of the adventures of different heroes, all of whom performed very daring deeds in order to make their country great and glorious. The Persian book in which these particular stories first appeared is called the "Epic of the Kings." It is, just like the "Arthur" stories, a collection of legends all concerned with the different kings of Persia, their battles and their victories, the trouble they got into from time to time, and their wonderful escapes from perils of every kind. But the real hero of the book is Rustem, a splendid sort of fellow, of gigantic strength, who always appeared on the scene to rescue the king from disgrace and defeat just when matters seemed quite hopeless. Some of the stories are concerned with his seven labours, which remind us very closely of the Twelve Labours of Hercules. Indeed Rustem is very like Hercules in many ways, so much so that some people have thought that the legends of the great Greek hero

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must have reached Persia, and been "nationalised," that is, that the people of that country liked to think he had once been their own countryman, and done those same deeds in their own country. Others, however, believe that every nation has its own ideal of a hero such as Rustem or Hercules or Alexander or Beowulf, against whom no earthly strength could prevail; and that, since the minds of men in all lands are very much alike, they invented the same kind of stories about him.

The stories of Rustem are also concerned with Rakush, his wonderful horse, whom boys will wish to have for their own; and in this respect they closely resemble the tales of Alexander and his steed Bucephalus, who took such a stirring part in his master's adventures.

Alexander had conquered Persia in former days, so that it is quite possible that legends of his renown have been worked into the story of Rustem and Rakush.

Then there is a very sad tale telling how, owing to a terrible mistake, the great Champion of Persia killed his beloved son Sohrab. This story has been told in verse by Matthew Arnold, who makes of it a very beautiful poem, portions of which have been quoted, and which I hope, when you have read the story, you will all want to read from beginning to end for yourselves. In some particulars I have followed the story as told by Arnold rather than the original version. Those of you who have read carefully the other stories in this series, taken from Greek and English literature, will perhaps like to notice the peculiar mark of Persian literature, which makes this, perhaps, different from the others, that is, the love its story-tellers have for bright colours, rich fabrics, sweet-smelling flowers, and glittering jewels. The imagination of the Eastern or Oriental races was wonderfully vivid

and glowing. It cared nothing for the sculpture that the Greeks loved so much, because it had no colour. Persia itself is, of course, a land of brilliant sunshine and startling contrast of light and shade, and this has evidently had a great effect on the minds of its people.

One last word about the poet who first told these stories in Persian poetry. His name was Firdausi, and he was born somewhere about the beginning of the eleventh century, that period when the Danes were over-running England and preparing to conquer it.

A legend of his birth says that when he was born, his father in a dream saw the child turn his face to the west, and lift up his voice, so that the whole world echoed with the sound. This, of course, foretold the wonderful poem he was to write. It took him thirty-three years to finish it; and when, old and weary, he brought it before the Sultan of Persia and laid it at his feet, the latter knew so little how to judge of good poetry, that he received it with anger and contempt, and drove the poet from the Court. For years the old man wandered from one city to another; and always the hate of the Sultan Mahmoud followed him and drove him forth; until at length, weary to death, he returned to his own native land, ready to meet death at his royal master's hands. But meantime the Sultan heard from every city and from every land the praise of old Firdausi and his song. So he began to get very uneasy; and one day, entering a mosque, he saw on the wall, where the poet had written it years ago with a diamond point, the verse:

"The happy court of Mahmoud is a sea,  
A sea of endless waves without a coast;  
In my unlucky star the fault must be  
If I who plunged for pearls in it, am lost."

Then his heart melted within him, and he longed to see  
Firdausi face to face and make amends. But ere he  
could do so, the old man died.

" His work was done ; the palaces of Kings  
Fade in long rows, and in loud earthquakes fall ;  
The poem that a godlike poet sings  
Shines o'er his memory like a brazen wall."

E. M. W.-B.