

**THE BOOK OF NOODLES;
STORIES OF
SIMPLETONS; OR,
FOOLS AND THEIR FOLLIES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649147984

The book of noodles; stories of simpletons; or, Fools and their follies by W. A. Clouston

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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W. A. CLOUSTON

**THE BOOK OF NOODLES;
STORIES OF
SIMPLETONS; OR,
FOOLS AND THEIR FOLLIES**

The Book-Lover's Library.

Edited by

Henry B. Wheatley, F.S.A.

TO MY DEAR FRIEND
DAVID ROSS, LL.D., M.A., B.Sc.,
PRINCIPAL OF THE
CHURCH OF SCOTLAND TRAINING COLLEGE,
GLASGOW,

THIS COLLECTION OF FACETIAS

IS DEDICATED.



PREFACE.

LIKE popular tales in general, the original sources of stories of simpletons are for the most part not traceable. The old Greek jests of this class had doubtless been floating about among different peoples long before they were reduced to writing. The only tales and apologues of noodles or stupid folk to which an approximate date can be assigned are those found in the early Buddhist books, especially in the "Jātakas," or Birth-stories, which are said to have been related to his disciples by Gautama, the illustrious founder of Buddhism, as incidents which occurred to himself and others in former births, and were afterwards put into a literary form by his followers. Many

of the "Jātakas" relate to silly men and women, and also to stupid animals, the latter being, of course, men re-born as beasts, birds, or reptiles. But it is not to be supposed that all are of Buddhist invention; some had doubtless been current for ages among the Hindūs before Gautama promulgated his mild doctrines. Scholars are, however, agreed that these fictions date at latest from a century prior to the Christian era.

Of European noodle-stories, as of other folk-tales, it may be said that, while they are numerous, yet the elements of which they are composed are comparatively very few. The versions domiciled in different countries exhibit little originality, farther than occasional modifications in accordance with local manners and customs. Thus for the stupid Brāhman of Indian stories the blundering, silly son is often substituted in European variants; for the brose in Norse and Highland tales we find polenta or macaroni in Italian and Sicilian versions. The identity of

incidents in the noodle-stories of Europe with those in what are for us their oldest forms, the Buddhist and Indian books, is very remarkable, particularly so in the case of Norse popular fictions, which, there is every reason to believe, were largely introduced through the Mongolians; and the similarity of Italian and West Highland stories to those of Iceland and Norway would seem to indicate the influence of the Norsemen in the Western Islands of Scotland and in the south of Europe.

It were utterly futile to attempt to trace the literary history of most of the noodle-stories which appear to have been current throughout European countries for many generations, since they have practically none. Soon after the invention of printing collections of facetiae were rapidly multiplied, the compilers taking their material from oral as well as written sources, amongst others, from mediæval collections of "exempla" designed for the use of preachers and the writings

of the classical authors of antiquity. With the exception of those in Buddhist works, it is more than probable that the noodle-stories which are found among all peoples never had any other purpose than that of mere amusement. Who, indeed, could possibly convert the "witless devices" of the men of Gotham into vehicles of moral instruction? Only the monkish writers of the Middle Ages, who even "spiritualised" tales which, if reproduced in these days, must be "printed for private circulation"!

Yet may the typical noodle of popular tales "point a moral," after a fashion. Poor fellow! he follows his instructions only too literally, and with a firm conviction that he is thus doing a very clever thing. But the consequence is almost always ridiculous. He practically shows the fallacy of the old saw that "fools learn by experience," for his next folly is sure to be greater than the last, in spite of every caution to the contrary. He is generally very honest, and does

everything, like the man in the play, "with the best intentions." His mind is incapable of entertaining more than one idea at a time; but to that he holds fast, with the tenacity of the lobster's claw: he cannot be diverted from it until, by some accident, a fresh idea displaces it; and so on he goes from one blunder to another. His blunders, however, which in the case of an ordinary man would infallibly result in disaster to himself or to others, sometimes lead him to unexpected good fortune. He it is, in fact, to whom the great Persian poet Sâdi alludes when he says, in his charming "Gulistân," or Rose Garden, "The alchemist died of grief and distress, while the blockhead found a treasure under a ruin." Men of intelligence toil painfully to acquire a mere "livelihood"; the noodle stumbles upon great wealth in the midst of his wildest vagaries. In brief, he is—in stories, at least—a standing illustration of the "vanity of human life"!