Huuf Cottage,
Yelverton,
R. S. O.
S[outh]. Devon

Dec[ember] 22. 1903

My dear Sir

Your letter, no doubt rather takes away from my claim to priority in the identification of the Islands of Wak-Wak; but at the same time it adds to the solidity of that identification. I certainly knew nothing of that any one else having done it. It came to me in a flash when reading your description of the cry of the Birds of Paradise, as I have said in my paper. The tracing of Hassan’s route was a more laborious affair and took me a year or two.

My knowledge of the A[rabian]. Nights, which is pretty intimate, happened in this way: When beginning practice, as a dentist, I had not much, to do, so I occupied my spare time with reading; and Lane’s A[rabian]. Nights was one of the books at hand.

Hassan’s itinerary, until he arrives at the "bathers" in the first of the islands of Wák-Wák, I adhere to as solid; but the subsequent route, through the lands of Birds, Beasts & Fairy Djin, I must confess I am in some doubt about; but I gave
in my paper the best explanation I could arrive at. I shall be interested in seeing how you explain it, if you do not accept the one I have given.

It is rather curious that you should feel inclined "to enlarge upon the truths almost always [[3]] underlying the stories of Savages". Because, after working out Hassan[']s story, I also had the same idea and worked it up for a Lecture which I delivered, at our Institute 8, "On the natural history of the Arabian Nights" though I should certainly should not include Muslims as savages.

I quite accept your explanation about writing, in your own name 9. I was afraid the other plan would prove impracticable, and should not have proposed it if you had not first done so.

You may not have noticed my touch about flying Serpents and Dragon flies, in the opening sentences of the paper, and so I will hazard a few word[s] in explanation. I was walking on the moor here one day, when a remarkable [[4]] flying affair passed me and settled on the wall. On examining it I found it to consist of two of the largest size dragon flies attached to each other, not in coitus; but the claspers at the tail of the foremost embracing the neck of the hinder one; and on asking our entomologist about it; he told me that, amongst these insects that is a common preliminary. Now the story in the A[rabian]. N[igh]ts. turns upon how a wealthy lady finds herself alone in the desert when two flying serpents alight by her and one has the tail of the other in its mouth, trying to devour it, the lady kills the devourer and the other flies away: but being a fairy comes back and delivers the lady from her peril. The startling appearance I had seen; the fact of the narrator being a Lady; and the name Dragon fly sufficiently account for the story in my mind.

Yours truly | F H Balkwill 10 [signature]

D r. Wallace

ENDNOTES

1. Page numbered WP1/8/144 in pencil in top LH corner.

2. The 'Isles of Wák-Wák ’ are the location of the fabulous Wák-Wák tree, described as having fruit in the form of beautiful women that hang off the tree by their hair, as mentioned in the Arabian Nights . The Aru Islands ( see Endnote 3) were the "Islands of Wák-Wák" of the story.
3. Paper read at the Plymouth Natural History Society, under the title *An Arabian Wallace*, in which he shows that, in the story of *Hasan of El Basrah*, as given in Lane's translation of the *Arabian Nights*, (see Endnote 5) there is an account of the hero's visit to the Aru Islands, which draws on myths and legends which grew around travellers' tales and the plumes of wonderful birds (the Birds of Paradise) which were found there.

4. In the story, Hasan is a young goldsmith. A Persian stranger offers to teach him how to transmute common metal into gold, but he drugs his food so he falls into a trance, then carries him away on a ship. The scene of the story ranges overland from Baghdad, through Central Asia to China, then to Malaya and thence to the Aru Islands. To his surprise, ARW found that everywhere in the story had a basis of recognisable geographical and biological fact, which suggests that it was based on travellers' tales rather than pure imagination.

5. *One Thousand and One Nights* is a collection of West and South Asian stories and folk tales compiled in Arabic. It is often known in English as the *Arabian Nights*.

6. Lane, Edward William (1801-1876). British Orientalist, translator and lexicographer known for his translation of *One Thousand and One Nights*, which he censored with the usual 19th-century view on Victorian morality.

7. Djinn (jinn, jann) are supernatural creatures in Islamic mythology.

8. Plymouth Literary Institute.


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