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EPITAPHE

Il vécut sans tourment, sans honte et sans effroi.
Il eut assez d'esprit pour désarmer le Roi
Mais non Allah, qui, l'emportant au Paradis
Avec son Vin, ses fleurs, son rire et ses chansons,
Le remit gentiment aux mains des Echansons.
C'est là qu'Omar Khayyàm, Hâfiz et Saâdi
Lui tiennent compagnie et le défient à boire.
— Avant de lire, ami, ce livre de mémoire,
Salue Abou-Nowas et sa lyre et sa gloire,
Car la mort et le temps, l'histoire et la légende
L'ont absous d'aimer trop cette exaltante offrande
Qu'un Monde corrupteur tend à l'âme trop grande.

ROBERT·EDWARD HART

INTRODUCTION

This compilation had its origin in, and grew up from a study of the companions of Harun Er-Rashid, particularly of Ja'afar and the Barmecides. The legendary Abu Nuwas was a familiar figure to me in Zanzibar and the manner in which an historical personage becomes a hero of folklore seems to me a study not without interest. Besides I have found that there is little in the English language or for a matter of fact in any European language about a man who is eminently worth knowing.

In so far, particularly, as the facts of Abu Nuwas's career are here recorded the book cannot claim to be complete : the field from which they have been collected is nothing more extensive than my own books, but I think enough is given to shew how the character of the actual Abu Nuwas is preserved in the legendary figure. It has afforded me some pleasure and amusement to write this study and I hope it may amuse, if not interest, those who read it.

I have not attempted publication for three reasons : firstly, because, as I have said, the book cannot claim to be complete ; secondly, because I am aware that the rhymes (for I can give them no higher title), for which I am responsible in the verses I have translated, are not good enough ; and thirdly, because the second part of the collection contains tales which cannot be considered suitable for general

publication ; they are in fact wherever they are read, distinctly pas pour les jeunes filles. I believe the time has past when apology is necessary for printing such matter. It is rightly thought today that no study of a people, and one may add, of a representative of a people, can be complete unless it includes the good and the bad, the pleasant and the unpleasant.

The third part of the collection, however, contains material for stories which can, I think, please the ear of the youngest listener. It consists of tales which are favourites among a race of grown up, but happy and carefree children.

One more word about my rhymes : I have made no attempt, as perhaps I ought to have done, to adhere to the metre of the original. I have simply sought to give a fairly close translation in rhyme.

I am deeply indebted to Mr. Robert-Edward Hart, the Mauritian poet, for reading the manuscript, making several suggestions for improvement and for the original EPITAPHE on Abu Nuwas which he has written for me.

Burton says of Abu Nuwas that he was the Rochester or Piron of his age. The first comparison seems to me extraordinarily close. Both were poets from an early age whose verse is largely disfigured by licentiousness. Rochester, however, although he shews his inclination towards vice sometimes censures it. Abu Nuwas, on the other hand, frankly exalts it, although there is reason to suppose that he is being as outrageous as possible with the object of drawing the greater attention to himself. In this, he has perhaps something more in common with Rochester, whose most extravagant excesses seem to have been copied from his pre-

decessors. Both the poets satirised their contemporaries unmercifully. Both were drunkards, and both were by instinct vicious, indulging in every kind of illicit amour and unable to resist temptation. Both were wits and both were favourites of their monarchs, in and out of disgrace from time to time, Abu Nuwas of Harun and Rochester of Charles II whose court had much in common with that of the Abbaside Caliph. Both of them were noted for their good looks and both, when they cared to exercise it, had charm of manner. Finally both of them became pious towards their ends.

When all this is said it is difficult in what we know of Abu Nuwas to find much in his favour, save that he was without a doubt a great poet, and that perhaps his instincts were not so depraved but that he could appreciate the more delicate aspects of nature. He appears to have had a reputation for some kindness to the poor and oppressed, and to have been at any rate and even in his worst moments honest, independent and (too) outspoken.

For Rochester, however, there is more to be said. Despite his innumerable infidelities he appears to have been genuinely in love with his wife. (Despite all obstacles to their marriage he eloped with her, and for this Charles put him in the Tower). In his youth, too, he was a sailor and shewed bravery. There is something delicate in some of his poetry which redeems him.

Rochester's excesses, though, were more than even his age could stand and he became ostracised by society, an outlawry which Abu Nuwas, despite the essential puritanism of Islam, did not suffer, for the court of the Abbaside Caliphs had, in adopting to a large extent the manner of life

of the luxury-loving Persians, moved far away from the austerity which surrounded the persons of Mukammad's immediate successors.

When one seeks for a French parallel to Abu Nuwas one would imagine that the field was extended, but in fact I have found it more difficult to find one Piron is not nearly such a close parallel as Rochester. Although he had a poetical apothecary for a father he does not appear to have become a poet at an early age, and all that he seems to have in common with Abu Nuwas are his obscenities, his witty epigrams and bons mots.

La Fontaine, too, is not a close parallel. He took to poetry at twenty-two but while his Contes have something in common with the spirit of Abu Nuwas in their offence to decency and morality, he is chiefly famed for his Fables and his Contes are merely regarded as an unpleasant vagary. While he found several powerful protectors he never obtained the favours of Louis XIV. However, he also took to religion in his later years.

Villon came from the scum of Paris and associated with scum all his life. He has in common with Abu Nuwas that his verses reflect impiety, immorality and satire, notwithstanding which, a real poetic genius. Although he owed his life to his king on one occasion at least, that cannot be compared to Abu Nuwas's escapes from death at the hands of Harun, for the circumstances were utterly different.

A slave of his instincts and again succumbing easily to temptation, Verlaine, who was an avowed imitator of Villon, also started young as a poet. He has this too in common with Abu Nuwas that he appears deliberately to

have sought notoriety in his verse by outstepping the dictates of decency and hymning his vices with some complacency.

The following lines of Verlaine show much of the spirit of Abu Nuwas's poetry :*

Ta voix claironne dans mon âme
 Et tes yeux flambent dans mon cœur :
 Le monde dit que c'est infâme,
 Mais que me fait, ô mon vainqueur !
 J'ai la tristesse et j'ai la joie
 Et j'ai l'amour, encore un coup,

L'amour ricaneur qui larmoie,
 O toi, beau comme un petit loup !

Tu vins à moi, gamin farouche.
 C'est toi, joliesse et bagou,
 Rusé de corps et de la bouche,
 Qui me violente dans tout

Mon scrupule envers ton extrême
 Jeunesse...

*PAUL VERLAINE : *Œuvres Libres*, IN LOUIS ESTÈVE :
Les grandes aberrations de l'amour romantique.
 Tome 1er, Paris : A. Maloine et fils, 1923.

MILLE E TRE

Mes amants n'appartiennent pas aux classes riches :
 Ce sont des ouvriers, faubouriens ou ruraux ;
 Leurs quinze et leurs vingt ans, sans apprêts,
 [sont mal chiches
 De force assez brutale et de procédés gros.

Je les goûte en habits de travail, cotte et veste ;
 Ils ne sentent pas l'ambre et fleurent de santé
 Pure et simple ; leur marche, un peu lourde, va, preste,
 Pourtant, car jeune, et grave, en l'élasticité ;

Leurs yeux francs et matois crépitent de malice
 Cordiale, et des mots naïvement rusés
 Partent, non sans un gai juron qui les épice,
 De leur bouche bien fraîche aux solides baisers.

* * * *

Mes deux Charles, l'un jeune tigre aux yeux de chatte,
 Sorte d'enfant de chœur grandissant en soudard . . .

* * * *


Lui, mon roi triomphal et mon suprême dieu,
 Taraudant tout mon cœur de sa prunelle bleue . . .
 Paul, un athlète blond, aux pectoraux superbes,
 Poitrine blanche . . .

. . . François, souples comme des gerbes,
 Ses jambes de danseur . . .

Auguste, qui se fait, de jour en jour, plus mâle
 (Il était bien joli quand ça nous arriva !)

Et vous tous, à la file, ou confondus en bande,
 Chéris sans nombre, qui n'êtes jamais assez.

We can, I think, truly say that Harun was a " Roi Soleil " for his patronage of the arts and sciences. The other poets who with Abu Nuwas shared in his favour were Abu al-Abbas al-Rakashi and Abu Musab Ahmed ibn Ali (ob. A. H. 242 = A. D. 856) who like Abu Nuwas had apartments in the palace, Ishak bin Ibrahim al-Mosili (b. A. H. 150 = A. D. 767, d. A. H. 235 = A. D. 849) whose father, also a musician of note, was so frequently the companion of Harun at the wine table that he was generally known as the cup-companion, al-Utbi, Abu al-Atahiyah Ismail bin Kasim (ob. A. H. 211 = A. D. 826), the famous Abu Sa'id Abd al-Malik, surnamed al-Asmai (ob. A. H. 216 = A. D. 831), Abu Tamman of Tay (ob. A. H. 230 = A. D. 844), Muslim bin al-Walid al-Ansari, Dibil al-Khuzai Abu Ali (ob. A. H. 246 = A. D. 860.)



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TO

THE MEMORY OF

SIR RICHARD BURTON

Abu Nuwas... I. The Actual

Abu Nuwas, whose personal name was Hal-Asan and cognomen Abu Ali, was born about the year 756⁽¹⁾ at al-Ahwaz on the river Karun, not far from the frontiers of the modern Iraq and no great distance from Basra. His father, Hani'al by name, was a native of Damascus and a soldier by profession; he belonged to the Hakami tribe. His mother was a Persian. Whether she was so poor that she was driven to it, or whether she was simply an unnatural parent, I know not, but she sold the child as a slave.

Sooner or later he came into the hands of Sa'ad al-Ashira al-Yemeni. For this reason he glorifies the Yemen in his verse; thus he boasts of Biurasp, the Persian king known to Arab historians as al-Dahhak, being a Yemeni:—

Al-Dahhak too was one of ours : him the camels
And the wild beasts served amidst their pasturage.⁽²⁾

He spent most of his youth at Basra and was freed by Sa'ad al-Ashira at an early age. Like many other poets Abu Nuwas made up his mind early as to the line of life he wished to pursue, but more fortunate than most he was able to undergo an education suitable to his talents. After he had been freed

a time at least lived at Baturunja, a pretty village in the suburbs.

In the following lines he has given a description of the onslaught of spring in the gardens of the suburb through the medium of a fanciful description of a battle of flowers :

O son of Wehb, the sleep which shuts thine eyes
Will not last long, for love within thee lies.

Baturunja's my home, and it's a place
Worth my regard whiles cups our tables grace.

Hear then my tale. I went a walk one day,
(And love had stolen my heart right away)
When narcissus called and said to my page :
'Stay ! for we have here a wine of great age.'
The heath cock was calling, charms filled the air,
Flowers were spending their sumptuous fare.
We went into gardens whose lustrous eyes
Were not black, like those which the houris prize.
Their eyelids were formed of petals of white
While buttons of yellow made pupils bright.
Suddenly rose at the top of his voice
Called, 'Bibulous friends, come here and rejoice.
'We've a wonderful wine, by time forgot,
'Whose very existence in mystery's wrapped'.
We ran to the rose nor recked we the pain
Of narcissus so rudely left lonely again.
But he, seeing rose's foul strategy, cried
'O noble anthemis, come to my side !'
Rose seeing yellow for battle arrayed,

Called pomegranate who came to his aid.
Apples of Lebanus came to the fore
For hatred had roused a longing for war.
The anthemis ranged in warrior rig
The army of lemon trees, little and big.

Then I saw Spring in the yellow side's beds,
But my heart was fain for the side of the reds.
'Twas simply because 'tis cheeks of that hue
That treat us to naught but sorrow and rue. (')

The young poet must have been a picturesque figure in the streets of Baghdad with his two long locks of hair (from which he gained his soubriquet of Abu Nuwas or Father of Ringlets) hanging down upon his shoulders. A figure like his, with a reputation for brilliant extemporisation, could not long remain unknown, and in a short time he attracted the attention of the Caliph. The court of Harun included a galaxy of all the talents of the Empire and poets were richly rewarded. Abu Nuwas was summoned to this brilliant assembly and was assigned apartments in the palace with the other court poets. It is clear that he must have been a poet of exceptional merit to gain as he did the reputation of the greatest Arab poet of his time. His personal characteristics, moreover, made him popular with Harun and he soon became a bosom companion of the Caliph's leisure and less reputable hours. Genial, cynical, and utterly immoral, he was a familiar figure at court and no fashionable drink party could

And when a guest drinks of this cup, his lip
 Seems at a star in darkest night to sip.
 All of the tavern the cup makes light is East,
 All that it leaves, in western shade doth dip.

* * * *

So quick's the light that from the goblet gleams
 It seems the drinker quaffs in brazier's beams.

! * ! *

' Arise and come with me, ' to him I said,
 ' Across the chinks I see dawn gleaming red. '
 ' The dawn ! ' cried he with an astounded air,
 ' No dawn is here but that the wine doth spread. '

He took the skin and drew its opening tight,
 At once, with trailing cloak, came back the night.

! * ! *

Pure gold when neat, and, water-mingled,
dazzling white,
 You'd think old Sol shoots at thee with his
darts of light.

* * * *

It seems in wine a potent flame doth burn
 Which fills thy breast with awe and fear by turn.

* * * *

An the water quench it not, so keen's the rose
red hue of it,
 ' Twill cheat their share of daylight from eyes
dazzled by the view of it.

* * *

‘ limits of hyperbole. It is not possible to find for the
 ‘ colour and the lustre of wine a term of comparison
 ‘ happier than that which this poet used, since light
 ‘ is the extreme expression of beauty.’ (5)

A popular game in Baghdad society was that called *nerd*, introduced from India. Er-Rashid himself was the first Caliph to play this game, which is a form of backgammon, and it thus became extremely fashionable. Playing it was one of Abu Nuwas’s most harmless pastimes, and he has left these lines on it:—

It simply does the opposite of what has been
decreed.
 But whether this be right or wrong it pays not
smallest heed.
 Since it submits not to my will, but I to its do bend.
 The fact ‘tis I who am the slave most clearly
doth perpend ! (6)

It is, however, to be feared that the amusements for which he has become notorious were not so harmless, and it is probable enough that many of the tales told of him in the Arabian Nights contain more than a grain of truth.

Examples of verse attributed to Abu Nuwas and bearing testimony to his championship of the worst vices will be found elsewhere, but it is right to recall that the Arabian Plutarch, Ibn Khallikan, in his great Biographical Dictionary remarks of him that he was one whose works belied his character and that while he sang of the ‘joys’ of homosexuality,

there was no one more greedy than he for the favours of women. (7) Indeed there is a good deal in the verse of Abu Nuwas and in anecdotes in which he figures which give one some ground for supposing that he was apt to paint himself blacker than he was for the mere pleasure of scoring a *succès de scandale*.

Like other court poets he was, of course, in the habit of singing the praises of the monarch and glorifying his deeds. The following lines, which even by Arab critics were considered feeble, were much relished in their time and were worth a pension to their author. They refer to the successful termination of Harun's expedition against Nicephorus, 'Dog of a Christian' as Harun addressed him.

We saw Heracleum with fright recoil
At sight of engines belching flame and oil.
And the fortress walls with our fires were light
As a fuller's cords neath a torch shine bright. (8)

The awful tragedy of the Barmecides, that never-to-be-erased blot on the brilliant reign of Harun, naturally did not leave him silent,

When fortune pushed the Barmecides from place
It smote them not with unforeseen disgrace.
'Think you the fate which Yahya's claims did ban
Will care the more for those of Rebi's clan? (9)

The following lament shews with some poignancy the gap that their removal made:

Since earth has put you away, O sons of Barmek,
 The roads of morning twilight and evening twilight
 Are empty. My heart is empty, O sons of Barmek. ⁽¹⁰⁾

As his reputation increased he grew jealous and critical of his contemporaries. He seems not to have possessed the virtue of suffering fools gladly and the whole of one chapter of his Diwan is devoted to his quarrels with other poets. This is not, however, to say that he was unable to appreciate merit when praise was due and it is related that when he heard that that same Abu Ubaida, referred to above, had come to Baghdad and to court, and that al-Asmai, a well-known poet and songster was also there, he said : ' As for Abu Ubaida, he will recite to them, if they will let him, all the history of the ancients, and the moderns too ; but as for Al-Asmai, he is a night-ingle who will enchant them by his songs.' ⁽¹¹⁾

It appears he made no attempt at diplomacy even when it would have appeared more politic to hold his peace. Thus we read that on one occasion Zobeidah asserted that her son Al-Amin was a good poet and induced him to submit some of his verses to Abu Nuwas's criticism. When the latter pointed out some gross violation of the rules of prosody in one of the lines, the young prince flew into a passion, and caused Abu Nuwas to be imprisoned. Some time after, Harun al-Rashid sent for the poet, was surprised to learn of his incarceration and the reason of it, and severely reprovved his son. Al-Amin asked to be allowed to read some other verses in the presence of his father as well as of Abu Nuwas, and

the Caliph acceded to his request. As soon as Abu Nuwas had heard the first few lines, he started up to leave the room. 'Where are you going?' asked Harun. 'Back to prison!' was the reply. ⁽¹²⁾

Nevertheless, on the death of Harun, Abu Nuwas enjoyed the favours of Al-Amin. It is believed that at a more advanced age he became pious,

'The Devil was sick, the Devil a Monk wou'd be;

'The Devil was well, and the Devil a Monk he'd be.'

This, however, did not remove the sting from his verses, and having insulted certain personages in his verse, they set on him in the middle of a feast and beat him so cruelly that he died of it, according to Abu'l Feda in the year of the Flight 195.

In his time he was reckoned, as has been said, the greatest of Arab poets and probably his fame has not been eclipsed by others of that race, though there were greater poets among the Persian mystics. It is however an accepted fact that Abu Nuwas and the brilliant assembly of poets who adorned the court of Harun owed much to Persian influences which, largely owing to the Barmecides, pervaded the Caliph's entourage. The period indeed represents a revolution in Arab poetry and the old classical tradition gave way to the school led by Abu Nuwas who was one of the first to ridicule the Kasidah or lengthy elegy. He characterised its set form as unnatural and satirised it in several poems. His greatest fame is as a maker of occasional verse, a lyric poet singing of wine and love.

He did not escape the charge of being a plagia-

rist. How much truth there was in it may be judged from the following conversation reported by Masudi. Koltum Attabi was denying the talent of Abu Nuwas. Someone, who had gathered the verses of the poet, said to him one day, 'How do you dare to deny the merit of Abu Nuwas after verses like these :

" If we sing thy fine deeds, the object thou art

" Of our praise, and higher than all that we find
in our heart.

" E'en though to another our praises we sing,

" It's ever to thee that our fancies take wing".

' It is a plagiarism ! ' cried Attabi.

' To what poet's prejudice ? ' demanded the reciter.

' Abu'l-Hodeil Jumahi. '

' In what passage ? '

' In this,

" If of one of them 'tis said

' He is a flower of heroes bred '

" — That is Mogeirah's son.

" Woman's womb has never borne

" Such a man as he ;

" Should a wife attempt it —

" Barren she will be."

His questioner then cited to him with admiration the following verse :—

' Through their veins

' This sweet liquor doth stealthily flow,

' As a medical draught through sick body doth go

‘ He has stolen this thought ! ’ exclaimed Attabi.

‘ From what poet ? ’

‘ From Shawsah Fakasi, ’ replied Attabi.

‘ In what place ? ’

‘ In this,

“ The patient has but to loose the skin,
This goodly draught will circulate within.
And when in his bowels it mingles at last,
He'll never remember the pain that is past. ”

‘ Here is another beautiful thought, ’ replied the reciter.

“ Their hands were only made to scatter deeds
sublime
Their feet were only fashioned the pulpit steps
to climb. ”

‘ Another plagiarism, ’ remarked Attabi.

‘ To whose detriment ? ’ asked the reciter.

‘ That of Merwan bin Abu Hafsah. ’

‘ And what are the verses which he has looted ? ’

‘ Here they are,

“ Their hands were only made to scatter deeds
sublime
Their tongues seemed but to fashion the human
speech in rhyme.

They vie in giving with the wind (which
brings the kindly rain).
And to them honeyed speaker hath never
looked in vain. ”

The reciter kept silent, but had he recited all the verses of Abu Nuwas, his contradictor would have replied ' Plagiarism ! ' (14)

With all his reputation for ready improvisation, Masudi records one occasion at least when he failed. It was at a gathering of poets. One of them asked for water and then cried :

' How sweet and tasty's Nature's mead ! '

Neither Abu Nuwas nor any of those present could complete the couplet when invited by the drinker, but Abu'l Atahyah entered and did so at once :—

' It is a goodly drink indeed ! ' (15)

His verses were not confined to subjects of revelry and debauchery, and he sang also of nature and of the changing seasons of the year :—

Look on the orchards of the world
 And think how works our God's good care.
 There are eyes of silver, which
 With liquid golden pupils stare
 On emerald stems ; and witness bear
 That Allah's one who doth not share. (16)

Pomegranate, lily and anemone
 Mix to make the apple hanging on its tree.
 They unite together, in a perfect blend,
 Like the cheeks of lovers at a journey's end. (16)

There is something reminiscent of the Roman poets in the ideas of the following lines :--

Eilul ⁽¹⁷⁾ indeed has gone with all its fires
The swift dog star has quenched his flaming pyres.

(With apologies to Fitzgerald—or with apologies to Virgil :—)

Praeteritus mensis September et occidit aestus
Jam rapidus torrens extinxit Sirius ignes. ⁽¹⁸⁾

And,

See'st thou not that the Sun has entered the Ram,
That the moment has come for the mean of the
hours ?

The birds long dumb have resumed their song ;

The wine again has become full strong.

The earth in her floral attire reclad,

Wears a dress you'll think fit for a festival glad.

Set thyself to the drink : go like nature to fun :

For already the season to dress has begun. ⁽¹⁹⁾

His poems were collected by several Arab editors, and one such collection contains nearly five thousand verses. Little or nothing of his work appears to have been translated into European languages, though his wine songs have been edited in a German edition, and there are editions published in Cairo and Beirut of some of his collected poems. ⁽²⁰⁾

Nicholson ⁽²¹⁾ speaks of Abu Nuwas being best known as an Oriental Howleglass or Joe Miller and remarks that it is often forgotten that he was a great poet who surpassed even Mutanabbi.

That he was not ashamed of the Persian blood he inherited from Jallaban, his mother, he evidences from these lines :—

Who are Tamin and Qays and all their kin ?
The Arabs in God's sight are nobody.

Of other lines he quotes the following wine songs :—

Thou scolder of the grape and me,
I ne'er shall win thy smile !
Because against thee I rebel,
'Tis churlish to revile.

Ah, breathe no more the name of wine
Until thou cease to blame,
For fear that thy foul tongue should smirch
Its fair and lovely name !

Come, pour it out, ye gentle boys,
A vintage ten years old.
That seems as though 'twere in the cup
A lake of liquid gold.

And when the water mingles there,
To fancy's eye are set
Pearls over shining pearls close strung
As in a carcanet.

Ho ! a cup, and fill it up, and tell me it is wine,
For I will never drink in shade if I can
drink in shine !

Abu Nuwas . . . II. The Apocryphal.

The stories of Abu Nuwas that we find in the Thousand Nights and a Night and similar sources can only be termed apocryphal, but as I have hinted above his real reputation was bad enough to justify one in believing that they contain more than a shred of fact, and even that they enshrine episodes that actually took place. It is indeed only the worst side of the poet we find here.

Wherever the Arab culture has spread we are sure to find tales of Abu Nuwas. Many of them no doubt are invented, but all of them reflect his popular reputation. I have thought best to include in this part the tales told of him in Morocco. Many of them occur in the Nights or in other collections of stories, but even those which do not, bear a stamp of the same atmosphere and are thus better placed with the others than amongst those in Chapter III, in which the poet's personality has been clothed in the mind of the Ethiopian.

His name will be frequently found in the Nights as one of Harun's companions. See, for example, the story of 'Ala al-Din Abu al-Shamat,' where Abu Nuwas in the company of Harun, Ja'afar and Masrur set out dressed as Dervishes on one of the Caliph's famous night excursions and are entertained by Ala al-Din. In Mardrus's version of the Arabian Nights

it is Abu Nuwas and not Ja'afar who discloses the Caliph to Ala al-Din as his benefactor, and the following words are put into his mouth as the reason for Harun's generosity : 'It is the greatest merit in 'his eyes to be young, appealing and beautiful. And 'he considers that one can never buy dear enough the 'sight of a beautiful person and the vision of a pretty 'face.' (1)

He is also referred to as a companion of Harun in the tale of 'Ja'afar the Barmecide and the Old Bedawi,' and in that of 'Harun al-Rashid and Abu Hasan, the Merchant of Oman.' In Mardrus's version we find him mentioned with his fellow poets of the household, al-Rakashi and Abu Musab, in the tale of 'The Caliph in the Basket.' (1) He is also mentioned in 'The Sleeper Awakened.' (1)

The tale of 'Nur al-Din Ali of Damascus and the Damsel Sitt al-Milah' contains an account of how Abu Nuwas, who is described as being 'one of those of whom it is said, "They love fair lads,"' met Nur al-Din in the streets of Baghdad. Seeing he was a stranger he shewed him the bazaars and streets and eventually went into the house of a slave-dealer. 'When the people of the house saw Abu Nuwas, they rose to do him reverence, for that which they knew of his rank with the Commander of the Faithful and the slave-dealer himself came up to them with two chairs whereon they seated themselves.' He then started selling a beautiful girl who refused all her bidders, only casting her eyes on Nur al-Din. However when he offered to buy her she

also refused to be sold to him, so Abu Nuwas and Nur al-Din left the house and 'went each his own way.'

In the tale of 'Harun al-Rashid and the Damsel and Abu Nuwas' the Caliph sends for him and he is found 'in a tavern pawned and pledged for a score of a thousand dirhams, which he had spent on a certain beardless youth.' When this youth appeared Abu Nuwas 'sighed a loud sigh and improvised these verses :

He shewed himself in shirt of white
 With eyes and eyelids languor dight.
 Quoth I, 'Dost pass and greet me not ?
 Though were thy greeting a delight?
 Blest He who clothed in rose thy cheeks,
 Creates what wills He by his might !'
 Quoth he, 'Leave prate, for sure my Lord
 Of works is wondrous infinite :
 My garment's like my face and luck ;
 All three are white on white on white.'

*

*

*

He shewed in garb anemone-red
 A foeman 'friend' entituled :
 Quoth I in marvel, 'Thou'rt full moon
 Whose weed shames rose however red :
 Hath thy cheek stained it red, or hast
 Dyed it in blood by lovers bled ?'
 Quoth he, 'Sol gave me this for shirt
 When hasting down the West to bed :
 So garb and wine and hue of cheek
 All three are red on red on red.'

He came in sable-hued sacque
 And shone in dark men's heart to rack :
 Quoth I, 'Dost pass and greet me not ?
 Joying the hateful envious pack ?
 Thy garment's like thy looks and like
 My lot, three blacks on black on black.'

After the score had been paid by Harun's chamberlain, Abu Nuwas goes to the Caliph who is in the company of a fair damsel and who asks him to make some verses containing the words 'O trusted of Allah, what may this be ?' When Abu Nuwas complies he speaks of all that has happened between the Caliph and the damsel who had spoken those words :

Long was my night for sleepless misery :
 Weary of body and of thought ne'er free :
 I rose and in my palace walked awhile,
 Then wandered through the halls of Haremry :
 'Till chanced I on a blackness, which I found
 A white girl hid in hair for napery :
 Here to her for a moon of brightest sheen !
 Like willow-wand and veiled in pudency :
 I quaffed a cup to her ; then drew I near,
 And kissed the beauty spot on cheek had she ;
 She woke astart, and in her sleep's amaze,
 Swayed as the swaying branch in rain we see ;
 Then rose and said to me, 'O Trusted One
 'Of Allah, O Amin, what may this be ?'
 Quoth I, 'A guest that cometh to thy tents
 And craves till morn thy hospitality.'
 She answered, 'Gladly I, my Lord, will grace
 And honour such a guest with ear and eye.'

The idea, says Burton, is that Abu Nuwas was a thought-reader, such being the prerogative of inspired poets in the East. His drunkenness and debauchery only added to his power.

After this he improvised : --

Say to the pretty one in veil of blue
 'By Allah, O my life, have ruth or dole !
 For, when the fair entreats her lover foul,
 Sighs rend his bosom and bespeak his soul :
 By charms of thee and whitest cheek I swear
thee,

Pity a heart for love lost all control :
 Bend to him, be his stay 'gainst stress of love,
 Nor aught accept what saith the ribald fool.'

The Caliph makes Abu Nuwas drunk, then hides the cup between the girl's thighs, and waking Abu Nuwas asks him, at the point of the sword, where it is hid. To which he gives a correct answer in verse :

My tale, indeed, is tale unlied ;
 'Twas yonder fawn who play'd the thief !
 She stole my cup of wine, before
 The sips and sups had dealt relief ;
 And hid it in a certain place,
 My heart's desire and longing grief
 I name it not, for dread of him
 Who hath of it command-in-chief. (')

In the story of 'Harun er-Rashid and the Three Poets,' Abu Nuwas again appears as a thought-reader. The Caliph's advances had been rejected by a damsel, who, however, had promised he might come

to her in the morning. But, in the morning, she said : 'the promise of night is effaced by day.' Harun told three of his courtiers to make verses on these words, and Abu Nuwas, in his turn, gives an account of all that passed between the Caliph and the girl,

As love waxt longer less met we tway
 And fell out, but ended the useless fray ;
 One night in the palace I found her fou' ;
 Yet of modesty still there was some display :
 The veil from her shoulders had slipt ; and shewed
 Her loosened trousers Love's seat and stay :
 And rattled the breezes her huge hind cheeks
 And the branch where two little pomegranates lay
 Quoth I, 'Give me tryst,' Whereto quoth she
 'To-morrow the fane shall wear best array :'
 Next day I asked her, 'Thy word ?' Said she
 'The promise of Night is effaced by Day.'

The Caliph, angered, orders Abu Nuwas to have his head cut off, saying, 'Thou wast with us yesternight in the Palace.' Said Abu Nuwas, 'By Allah, I slept not but in my own house ! I was directed to what I said by thine own words as to the subject of the verse ; and indeed quoth Almighty Allah (and He is the truest of all speakers) : As for poets (devils pursue them !) dost thou not see that they rove as bereft of their senses through every valley and that they say that which they do not ?' (Koran XXVI, 5, 6). So the Caliph forgave him and gave him two myriads of money.

In yet another story, that of 'The Caliph Harun al-Rashid and Queen Zobeidah in the Bath', we are

given another instance of Abu Nuwas's thought reading :—

One day when Zobeidah was bathing in her pool Harun al-Rashid spied upon her. She was pouring water over herself from a silver ewer, when, presently, seeing the Caliph, she tried to cover herself for shame of being seen naked. The Caliph went away and recited this couplet :

I looked on her with loving cyne
And grew anew my old repine :

'But he knew not what to say next ; so he sent for Abu Nuwas, repeated the line to him, and said "Make me a piece of verse commencing with this line." ' I hear and obey,' replied the poet and in an eye-twinkling extemporised these couplets :

I looked on her with loving cyne
And grew anew my old repine
For the gazelle, who captured me
Where the two lotus-trees incline :
There was the water poured on it
From ewer of the silvern mine ;
And seen me she had hidden it
But 'twas too plump for fingers fine.
Would Heaven that I were on it,
An hour, or better two hours, li'en.

The following is a translation of Mardrus's version for the last two lines :

Oh that I might like wavelet bound
And soft caress that gentle mound !
Or, for an hour or two I'd wish
To change myself into a fish. (")

It is chiefly the worst side of Abu Nuwas that we find in the Arabian Nights, and there are preserved the worst and most licentious of his lines. In the story of 'The Man's Dispute with the Learned Woman', Abu Nuwas is quoted as the chief of the Sodomites as saying :

Slim waist and boyish wits delight
Wencher, as well as Sodomite.

And again :

The least of him is the being free
From monthly courses and pregnancy,

and,

O tribe that loves the cheeks of boys, take fill
Of Joys in Paradise shall ne'er be found.

In 'Maidens or Youths' we find,

When his detractors said to me,
Hair on his lips, alack, we see,
Wrinkling, spoiling beauty.

I unto them made answer straight,
How can you this a defect rate?
It is an ornament.

The whiteness of his teeth and face
The down relieves, and adds a grace
Like dress to glitt'ring pearls.

It is to me a charming sign
Of new and growing force divine
Which he is acquiring.

Harun found Abu Nuwas sometimes beyond the mark. In this story Abu Nuwas beguiles three fair youths into his house where he sings their praises in many couplets.

Steer ye your steps to none but me
 Who hath a mine of luxury ;
 Old wine that shines with brightest blee
 Made by the monk in monastery ;
 And mutton-meat the toothsomest
 And birds of all variety,
 Then eat of these and drink of those
 Old wines that bring you jollity :
 And have each other, turn by turn,
 Shampooing this my tool you see.

I'll ransom that beauty-spot with my soul ;
 Where's it and where is a money-dole ?
 Praise Him who hairless hath made that cheek
 And bid Beauty bide in that mole, that mole !

And loveling weareth on his cheek a mole
 Like musk, which virgin camphor ne'er lets off it ;
 My peepers marvel such a contrast seeing ;
 And cried the Mole to me, 'Now bless the
 Prophet.'

Meltêd pure gold in silvern bowl to drain
 The youth, whose fingers wore a winey stain :

which Abu Nuwas answered : 'None whatsoever except that I made our Lord the Caliph a present of the best of my poetry and he presented me, in return, with the best of his raiment.' 'When the Prince of True Believers heard this, he laughed, from a heart full of wrath, and pardoned Abu Nuwas, and also gave him a myriad of money.'

Abu Nuwas's head must have been in danger many times and he probably saved it at the hands of Harun only by his ready wit. Harun, one day, in one of his moods of righteous indignation ordered Abu Nuwas to be put to death.

'Are you going to kill me' asked the poet, 'out of mere caprice?' 'No' said Haroun Alraschid, 'but because you deserve it.' 'But,' pleaded the poor fellow, 'God Almighty first calls sinners to account, and then pardons them. How have I deserved death?' 'For that verse of poetry of yours in which you say :

"O, prithee, give me wine to drink, and tell me
it is wine !

" Let me have no concealment, when plain
dealing may be mine."

'And do you know, O commander of the Faithful,' asked Abu Nuwas, 'whether they gave me it, and I did drink?' 'I suspect so,' said the Caliph. 'And would you kill me on suspicion, when the Koran says, "some suspicion is a sin?"' 'You have written other things,' said Haroun, 'which deserve death. That atheistic verse of yours, for instance :

'None has e'er come back to tell
If he in Heaven or Hell doth dwell.'

'And has anyone come back to tell us?' asked the poet. 'No', said the monarch. 'Then surely you would not kill me for telling the truth!' said Abu Nauwâs. 'But, besides all this,' continued Haroun, 'was it not you who wrote those blasphemous lines :

'Mohammed, thou to whom we look when
trouble's storms arise,
Come, on, sir, for we twain could beat the
Monarch of the Skies.'

'Well,' asked Abu Nauwâs meekly, 'and did we?' 'I don't know what you did', answered the Caliph. 'Then surely your Majesty will not kill me for what you don't know.' 'Cease this nonsense', said Haroun Alraschid, getting impatient. 'You have over and over again in your poetry confessed to things for which you deserve death.' 'God knew all all about those things,' said Abu Nauwas, 'long before your Majesty did, and He said in the Koran : "Those poets are followed by their familiar demons. "Seest thou not how they wander in every valley, "and how they say things which they never do!" 'Let the fellow go,' said Haroun 'there's no catching him any way.'

Abu Nuwas was at the palace one evening during a drinking party. A beautiful young man was of the company. There was drinking, singing, and reciting of pleasant verses and amusing quips.

The time for sleeping having come, they stretched out on mattresses. Abu Nuwas was on one of these and the youth on a higher bed beside him.

In the middle of the night the Caliph, who feared for the virtue of the young man, rose up and came to see what was happening. He found Abu Nuwas on his neighbour's bed. 'What are you doing there?' he asked in a stern voice.

'My Lord,' said the poet, 'I stirred in my sleep, I rolled over, and by chance fell into this bed.' 'May Allah cause thee to die.' cried the Caliph suppressing a desire to laugh. 'Does one now fall from below to above?' ⁽¹⁰⁾

It appears that with all his vices Abu Nuwas was quite indifferent as to who knew of them and exhibited them in the most public places. One is justified in wondering whether there was not something pathological in his complete lack of morality.

One day he met a youth in the streets of Baghdad who was so beautiful that he did not refrain from throwing himself upon him and kissing him on the mouth. Angered, the young man took the poet before the Kadi. But the Kadi, so the story goes, was so dazzled by his beauty that he recited the following verses:—

In truth an thou wouldst not be bussed
 Nor have folk bite thy cheek and lip,
 Then wander not abroad the town
 Unless thou'rt veiled from head to hip!
 Leave not a fringe on thy fair brows
 Nor let thy locks on temples stray,
 For doing thus thou plagu'st poor wights
 And dost the Muslims' Kadi slay.

The young man, slightly disconcerted, thought for a moment and replied as follows :—

We told ourselves, with fondest hope,
That at thy hands we'd justice got.
We were deceived. How can the world
Improve, when Kadi follows Lot ? (11)

In reading these depravities, however, the verdict of Ibn Khallikan must not be forgotten and the following anecdote in some measure bears it out.

It is related that the wife of Abu Nuwas had but little confidence in the faithfulness of her husband, and wished to put it to the test. For this purpose she dressed herself carefully, letting a delicate white hand and some jewels be seen under her thick veils, as women of loose life were wont to do, and at nightfall went to meet Abu Nuwas.

He, seeing this elegant woman, made proposals to her, and as she accepted them he brought her to his house. Finally she raised her veil and began insulting him : ' It is thus that you would deceive me ! Gadabout ! Libertine ! Blush for your conduct...'

But, without shewing any other emotion, Abu Nuwas said to her, ' How sweet and charming you are when I take you as a mistress ! And how cold and disagreeable you are when you are my legitimate wife ! ' (12)

The following lines, of which two in Burton's translation are quoted above, perhaps shew the type he admired most :—

Like ephebe she has no hips
 And has even cut her hair.
 Soft the pressure of her lips,
 Velvet down on face so fair.

This a double charm doth give,
 Satisfying both their tastes,
 He who for boys doth only live
 And he who likes the lassies' waists. ('')

And again :—

Like a boy's are her slender hips as she stands
 And braces herself to the gentle breeze,
 As a branch of the willow steadies itself
 At whisper of wind in far away trees.('')

One day when Harun was bored, as he often was, he sent for Abu Nuwas and asked for his advice.

'You must arrange your life, O Prince of True Believers,' said Abu Nuwas, 'so as to be happy in this world and in the other. For the latter, do good works, found schools and hospitals, God will reward you in Paradise. As for this earth, profit from its joys, enjoy pleasures, love, and notably take a great number of wives..' He continued in this vein for some time and then left, having considerably cheered the Caliph. Zobeidah, however, happened to have overhead the conversation from behind a curtain. She was furious at this counsel and sent some slaves to beat the poet who had to keep to his bed for several days after this treatment.

The Caliph having again sent for him and having asked him to repeat what he had said the last time, Abu Nuwas, who had guessed, on seeing a curtain lightly moving, that Zobeidah was hidden there, declared: 'O Prince of True Believers, I told you to take only one wife. Indeed, poets and moralists have said that unhappiness lies in the possession of two wives, calamity in the possession of three, and that it is better to be dead than to have four; whilst, on the contrary, all the joys of love and peace are tasted with only one wife who is cherished and who adores you. That was my advice my lord.'

'May I cut off my head with my own hands if I heard you speak so!' cried Harun al-Rashid.

'There is, it is true, one thing that I have not yet told you, it is this: The Arabs say that the Benu Makhzun are the flower of the tribe of Qoreishites, and you have the flower of the Benu Makhzun' (that is to say Zobeidah who came from this tribe).

'I tell you again that you never advised me to have only one wife,' the Caliph repeated. 'Would you dare to contradict me?'

'But my lord, do you then wish me to die in my bed?' cried the poet, making an allusion, which Zobeidah alone understood, to his recent bastinadoing. Then the princess spoke from behind the curtain. 'Yes,' she said, 'You are right, Abu Nuwas, you only said that...'

'Which you have just heard, my lord,' added Abu Nuwas, whom the Caliph dismissed on these

words and to whom Zobeidah sent a large sum of money.

At another time the poet related what had passed to Harun al-Rashid who laughed greatly and also gave him a present. ⁽¹⁵⁾

Abu Nuwas, however, from various tales we read never much minded how high his shafts struck. Having more than usually annoyed Zobeidah on one occasion she demanded his head of her husband.

'I cannot put him to death,' declared Harun al-Rashid, 'but I am willing to give him the bastinado, so long as I can find an occasion and a pretext.'

Pretexts were not lacking and the occasion was not long in coming. He was found one day with a bottle. It is true, it was empty. The Caliph no less condemned him to receive a hundred blows with the stick. 'Why O Prince of True Believers?' asked the poet.

'Because you have with you a bottle in which wine is put.'

'It is then to death that you should condemn me.'

'Why?'

'Because I also have with me a tongue with which I could blaspheme, or profess atheism.'

This answer caused the Caliph to laugh and Abu Nuwas again escaped. ⁽¹⁶⁾

Harun was not above drinking himself, but he disapproved of public drinking, while Abu Nuwas was shameless. Another day Harun surprised him with a bottle in his hand. 'What have you got there?' he asked.

'Nothing, sire,' said the poet, quickly passing the bottle to his left hand and holding it behind his back while shewing his right hand.

'Then shew me your other hand,' continued the Caliph.

'Here it is, O Prince of True Believers!' said the poet immediately taking the bottle in his right hand and shewing his left to the Caliph.

But he, inexorably, continued in a stern voice, 'Shew me your two hands at the same time.'

Then Abu Nuwas placed the bottle against the wall and held it there by pressing his back to it.

'Turn round,' insisted Harun al-Rashid.

'Then it will fall, my lord,' answered Abu Nuwas, which made the Caliph laugh. ⁽¹⁷⁾

How shameless of his sin of drunkenness he was may be judged from the following anecdote.

One day he saw a man overcome with wine, who was singing with all his might, saying stupid things, walking crookedly and staggering wildly. Abu Nuwas roared with laughter at this spectacle.

'What!' someone said to him, 'Have you never seen a drunkard before?'

'Certainly not,' replied the poet, 'For I always drink and I am always the first to get drunk and the last to wake up.' ⁽¹⁸⁾

Examples of some of the retorts which made him so many enemies are shewn in the following stories.

A very ugly man was speaking one day of the devil, in the presence of Abu Nuwas, and said: 'I should very much like to see his face.'

'You have only to pick up a mirror' said Abu Newas. ⁽¹⁹⁾

One day he saw another extremely ugly man praying and asking God to forgive his sins, and begging Him to admit him to paradise.

'Why' my dear man,' Abu Newas said to him, 'do you wish to deprive hell of such a face ?' ⁽²⁰⁾

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'When will you die ?' someone asked him one day.

'Why do you ask me that ?'

'Because I have a letter to send to my late father.'

'My dear man,' replied the poet, 'I shall not pass by hell. Send it by someone else.' ⁽²¹⁾

Apparently when he felt it necessary he was prepared to try and avoid the consequences of his rudeness. He had spoken ill of a great person who was told of it and became very angry. Fearing his resentment or regretting the intemperance of his language, the poet went to ask his pardon.

'With what boldness dare you present yourself before me ?' asked the man.

'With the boldness,' replied Abu Nuwas, 'with which I shall present myself before God, for my sins toward Him are greater than my faults toward you.' ⁽²²⁾

Usually, however, as I have already said, he cared little about letting even the highest and those in the best position to do him injury know what he

thought of them. In the following tale he is shewn covering his retreat in a masterly way.

Harun had a very beautiful concubine called Khalisa, whom he greatly loved. One day he made her a present of a magnificent pearl necklace. Abu Nuwas heard of this gift; he did not like the favourite who always mocked him and sought to lower him in the estimation of the Caliph.

One day he slipped into the private apartments of the palace and chalked the following verse on the lady's door :

Because it's written on this door
My poetry hath gathered blight,
And so Khalisa greatly harms
The gems with which she is bedight.

Then he hid close by.

Khalisa, when she saw the inscription, became very angry and declared to the Caliph, 'If you do not put this impertinent Abu Nuwas to death, I shall kill myself.'

'Let us go and see what it is,' said Harun al-Rashid. 'If it's true, he shall be punished.'

But meanwhile the wily poet went and modified the inscription. It was sufficient to change a couple of letters for the verse to read :

Because it's written on this door
My poetry hath gathered light,
And so Khalisa greatly charms
The gems with which she is bedight.

And the Caliph could find nothing in this compliment with which to find fault. ⁽²³⁾

At that time, Harun al-Rashid had a favourite whom he greatly loved. One day he wished to go to her ; but she, being then indisposed, was unable to receive him.

Bored, he returned to his apartments and began talking to his viziers and favourite poets, among the number of whom was Abu Nuwas.

Some moments later, the favourite in question sent the Caliph a plate of coriander (*Keutsbeur*).

‘What does that signify?’ asked Harun al-Rashid.

Then Abu Nuwas said to him, ‘O Prince of True Believers, you may go to her who has sent you this symbolical dish, by which she wished to shew you that her indisposition has now passed’ (*keust beurt*).

This interpretation was worth a large present to the poet. ⁽²⁴⁾

The following is an amusing Moroccan story, on the face of it mythical :—

One day when Abu Nuwas had amused Harun al-Rashid with his poems, his jokes and his lively conversation, the Caliph said to him, ‘Ask me a favour. It is granted in advance.’

‘Well, sire,’ replied the poet, ‘I shall only ask one thing of your kindness : a paper signed with your hand and sealed with your seal giving me the right to take an ass from any man who is afraid of his wife.’

‘Let it be so,’ said the Caliph.

Some time afterwards Abu Nuwas, having travelled across the empire, returned, followed by an immense herd of asses. Seeing a cloud of dust on the horizon, Harun al-Rashid asked what it was. He was told that it was Abu Nuwas returning to Baghdad.

The Caliph caused the poet to be brought to him and asked him for details of his journey.

‘I went here and there,’ related Abu Nuwas, ‘I saw all sorts of countries, I crossed rivers and chains of mountains. I met quantities of men who were afraid of their wives, and I asked each one of them for an ass, in conformity with the paper you gave me. I also saw many charming women, and notably in such and such a town, a young girl beautiful as the moon in its fourteenth day, with wonderful black eyes, a waist as supple as a palm tree, with hair... with eyes..., verily a wonder, worthy of the one Caliph...’

‘Speak lower,’ the Caliph then said, ‘my wife Zobeidah is behind that curtain and might hear us.’

‘Ah!’ cried Abu Nuwas in triumph. ‘You also must give me an ass, and even two, as you are Caliph and you also are afraid of your wife.’⁽²⁵⁾

Another story recounts that on one occasion the Caliph asked Abu Nuwas to give him an excuse which would be worse than the fault. He waited for an opportunity, and one day when the prince was standing in the palace Abu Nuwas came up behind and caught hold of him by his shoe. The prince

turned round in anger, saw Abu Nuwas — he had forgotten what he had asked him — and said to him : ‘What is the meaning of this ?’

‘Forgive me, sire, I took you for the queen.’

‘Wretch, if it had been the Queen, would you have acted thus? The excuse is worse than the fault.’

‘That is what you asked me for,’ said Abu Nuwas. The Caliph understood, roared with laughter, gave him a present, and Abu Nuwas went away happy. ⁽²⁰⁾

A favourite tale which has had a wide circulation and which sounds far more like an African story than one of a monarch of Harun’s type is the following :—

‘The Caliph was seated in his diwan with his equerries around him, intent upon an evening’s amusement. Abu Nauwâs, however, had not arrived, and the Caliph devised a clever plan for punishing him for being late. He arranged a game at forfeits, in which the rule was to be that every one who did exactly as he did should receive a dinar — about half-a-sovereign ; but anyone who failed to keep up the game was to receive a dozen strokes of the bastinado. Haroun then ordered in some eggs, and, putting one under his own cushion, commanded his followers to do the same, and they had scarcely completed their preparations when the missing poet came in. The Caliph began the game, and having proposed to Abu Nauwâs to join, began clucking like a hen, and produced an egg. Each of the courtiers

did the same, and it came at last to Abu Nauwâs's turn. With all eyes fixed on him with a wicked stare, he stalked into the middle of the room, flapped his arms against his sides, and crowed loudly "Cock-a-doodle doo," to indicate that he alone was cock of the walk.' (27)

'Another ridiculous story is told of Abu Nauwâs, that the Caliph once bought his beard of him for a sum of money down, and allowed him to keep it till it should be wanted. The poet having subsequently done something to offend him before the whole court, Haroun cried out warningly, "Mind your beard!" "Thank Allah!" said Abu Nuwas, "it is mine again, since the Commander of the Faithful says so!"' (28)

One day Abu Nuwas said to the Caliph, 'O Commander of the Faithful! You know that I am a Musulman.'

'Yes, I know,' said Harun al-Rashid.

'I wish to go on the pilgrimage to Mecca, as is prescribed,' went on the poet.

'Well, the road is in front of you.'

'But I have no money.'

'In that case you are freed from the obligation.'

'O my lord, I am asking you for money, I am not asking you for a *fetwa* (a legal opinion).'

 (29)

So much for Abu Nuwas and his master.

The following are further anecdotes collected in North Africa, which illustrate his turn of mind.

Abu Nuwas heard a miser one day refusing alms to a beggar.

'At least give me a piece of bread,' he said.

'I have none in the house,' replied the miser.

'Then give me a little water to drink.'

'I have no glass.'

'Then,' interrupted Abu Nuwas, 'you are even poorer than this wretch. It is you who should be begging.'⁽³⁰⁾

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'Which is better,' someone asked Abu Nuwas, 'when one is in a funeral procession in the middle of which the bier is being carried. Which is better, to walk before or behind the bier?'

'It does not matter at all,' he replied, 'so long as you are not inside, you can be wherever you like.'⁽³¹⁾

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A man died without leaving a penny for his heirs. He had a son, a daughter, a mother, and a wife.

'How is one to divide the inheritance?' Abu Nuwas was asked.

'In the following manner,' declared the poet: 'the son will have the orphanhood, the daughter the loss, the mother the mourning, and the wife the widowhood and the destruction of the house. What remains of the misfortunes and sorrows will be divided between the other relatives.'⁽³²⁾

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One day Abu Nuwas was in the house of one of his friends when the ceiling started to crack.

‘What is the meaning of this, my dear friend?’ he asked.

‘Do not be afraid, it is the ceiling which praises God.’

On hearing these words, Abu Nuwas immediately went out. ‘Where are you going?’ asked his friend.

‘I am afraid that its piety may increase and that it may prostrate itself when I am inside.’ The other laughed and left him. ⁽³³⁾



Abu Nuwas . . . III. The Mythical.

In the East it is probably by word of mouth that the fame of Abu Nuwas has chiefly spread. Amongst the Swahili of Zanzibar he is known as Kibunwasi, Bunwasi, Banawasi, or Abunwasi, more rarely, and by the "litterati" as Abunawasi. Quick of wit and ready of repartee it is perhaps not surprising that he has been compared with the Hare, Brer Rabbit as we know him better, and the exploits of the one are frequently attributed to the other. Another identification of Abu Nuwas is with Mwalim Kargoss the Zanzibar Punch and perhaps the origin of our own friend. This too is by way of the Rabbit for the name Kargoss is derived from the Persian Khar-Gosh, a hare.

The prefix Ki- denotes the diminutive when used as in the Swahili name for the poet and the Swahili conception of him is as small and cunning. It has been stated that Banawasi has become a proper name meaning 'a man who always has an answer ready, who excels in repartee — a man in fact who laughs best because he always laughs last.' For my part, I am inclined to doubt that the personality of Abu Nuwas has so entirely disappeared on the East African Littoral. In the stories about him which I have heard and collected, he has been a real enough person, but his characteristics

are so well known that the Swahili will speak of an Abu Nuwas as we speak of a Don Juan or a Don Quixote. (1)

In the following tales even when Harun al-Rashid and the City of the Caliphs appear we see the resplendent figure of the mighty Commander of the Faithful dwindle to that of a petty African kingly, while the palaces and domes of Baghdad fade away and are replaced by the mud walls and thatched roofs of the native village.

The first story plainly has its origin in an Arabian Nights' tale in which, however, Abu Nuwas plays no part at all, for the bargain to share what the Caliph might give was made between Masrur the Eunuch and one Ibn al-Karibi :— (2)

Abu Nuwas was much loved by Harun Rashid. So much so that Harun Rashid was unable to spend a whole day without seeing him. He went to Harun's house at a time when Harun was not receiving. He got to the door and met the doorkeepers and wanted permission to go up. The doorkeepers said, 'People have not permission to go up now.' Now those doorkeepers knew that Abu Nuwas was summoned that day. The chief doorkeeper came out and said, 'I will give you leave to go up but anything you get you must share equally with me.' Abu Nuwas said, 'Very well, I agree,' and they wrote an agreement that anything he got they would share equally. Abu Nuwas took the signature of the doorkeeper and the doorkeeper that of Abu Nuwas.

Abu Nuwas went up into Harun's presence.

When he arrived before him he did not greet him and squatted down silent. Harun Rashid did not like Abu Nuwas sitting silent without greeting him. 'O Abu Nuwas, what is the matter with you to day?'

He answered, 'I want you to beat me with a hundred strokes.'

Harun Rashid loved Abu Nuwas. He could not beat him. He said, 'Leave these words, Abu Nuwas.'

Abu Nuwas replied, 'No, you must beat me.'

Harun Rashid took a stick and beat him, but very lightly. He beat him until fifty strokes were given. Then Abu Nuwas took the writing of the doorkeeper and shewed it to Harun Rashid saying, 'I have a companion and we have agreed that whatever I get from you we will share half and half, and now I have had fifty strokes and he must have fifty.'

Harun Rashid ordered him to go and fetch the head doorkeeper. He was brought and he ordered him to be beaten with fifty strokes. Harun said to him 'That is your punishment. Do not do it again.'⁽³⁾

This is not the only example of a role in an Arabian Nights' tale in which Abu Nuwas was not concerned being attributed to him. The following is a further example, this time from North Africa. The tale is really based on that of 'The Porter and the Three Ladies of Baghdad.' This version varies somewhat from the original but in the tale itself Abu Nuwas was not one of the guests :

One day Abu Nuwas saw a house on the door of which was written these words : 'Enter here, if you

care to. Eat and drink. Enjoy yourself. But, whatever you see, ask no questions.'

He entered, was received very pleasantly, ate and drank to the sound of music, and saw a she-dog, quite covered with necklaces, jewels, rings of gold and silver, sitting on a throne.

Then the master of the house caused a very beautiful young woman whom he called Hadika to be brought in, her arms bound with chains, and he ordered a strong negro slave to whip her until blood came.

Astonished and indignant, Abu Nuwas asked the reason for what was happening. Then the master of the house said angrily, 'You have forgotten the promise not to ask questions and are going to be punished for it.' And he caused him to be beaten unmercifully by the black.

Abu Nuwas fled and resolved to play a joke on the vizier Ja'afar. The following day he took him to that house and when Ja'afar had assisted at the same spectacle, he could not refrain from asking a question, which caused him also to be beaten.

The next day, Abu Nuwas and Ja'afar having related the story to the Caliph Harun al-Rashid, he resolved to visit the strange house, and went there, at night, with them.

Everything occurred as before. But the master of the house had recognised the Caliph. When Harun questioned him, he said, 'I cannot beat you like the others, O Prince of True Believers! and I am going to tell you my story. Know that this woman is my

wife. One day I surprised her in the arms of a slave. As I threw myself upon them they resisted me, tied me with cords, and continued to make love in front of my eyes so as to outrage me the more. Thanks be to God, this dog here freed me by cutting the cords with his teeth. Then I killed the slave, and since then, each evening I whip the unfaithful wife without being able to make her ask my forgiveness.' (4)

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Abu Nuwas built a two-storeyed house. When it was finished he looked for someone to buy it, but could not find anyone. But luckily he got a merchant who agreed to buy. However Abu Nuwas sold him the top storey only and put him a ladder outside. Matters remained like this for a long time. At last Abu Nuwas wanted to conclude the business and make the merchant buy the bottom half from him. The merchant refused to buy.

Abu Nuwas looked for another client but could not find one. So he made another plan. He collected a large number of labourers and came with them to his house. He called out to the merchant who was above and said to him, 'I want to break up my house below, so you look after your house above, and don't come and say I didn't tell you.'

The merchant was defeated by the guile of Abu Nuwas and he bought the house at Abu Nuwas's price. (5)

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One day Kibunwasi was going along the road with his goat and he met three thieves, who, when

they saw him coming, agreed that one of them should pretend to have a stomach-ache and lie down on the ground. Kibunwasi came up, and seeing the man on the ground, asked what was the matter, and he said, 'I am in great pain.' So Kibunwasi said, 'Are you able to hold a goat's string?' and he replied 'Yes.' So he took the man up and carried him, and gave him the goat's rope to hold.

On the way the thief let the goat go, unknown to Kibunwasi, who, on reaching his house, asked the thief what had happened to it. And the man said 'I was in great pain, and the string slipped out of my hand.'

Meanwhile the other two thieves had caught the goat and killed it, and divided it into three parts, and their companion, who had pretended to be ill, managed to escape from Kibunwasi's house while he was away, and soon rejoined them. When Kibunwasi found out he had gone, he told his wife that he must go and find them, but before doing so he got two gazelles, which he fastened in the yard, and a bladder which he filled with blood. He said to his wife, 'I will follow the thieves with one gazelle, and you must fasten the bladder of blood to your throat.' And she did so.

He then went and found the thieves, and after talking to them for some time, told them he wanted to join them, and they agreed to let him. Whilst they were going back to his house he hit the gazelle with a stick and said, 'Go to my wife and tell her to cook food for three.' The gazelle ran away into the bush.

When they arrived home at Kibunwasi's house, he called out, 'Wife' have you cooked the food?' and she said, 'No. Why?' And he said, 'Didn't the gazelle tell you to?' She replied, 'The gazelle came back and went into the hut and told me nothing.' Then Kibunwasi fetched the second gazelle and asked why it hadn't told her, and the gazelle cried, 'I told her a long time ago to do it.' Kibunwasi then went and knocked his wife down, cutting the bladder at her throat, and she pretended to be dead. The thieves were very frightened, and said, 'He has killed his wife.' But Kibunwasi said, 'She has no sense, so I punished her,' and he took a bottle of medicine and let her smell it, then touched her with a stick. When she got up he told her to wash herself and then cook some food, then they all sat down and ate.

After they had finished, the thieves, who had been greatly struck with what they had seen, asked if he would let them have the gazelle, the stick and the medicine, and after some discussion he sold them to them for a thousand rupees, and they took the things and went away. After they had gone Kibunwasi ran away from that place and went and lived in another country.

One day when the thieves were out with the gazelle, one of them hit it with the stick and told it to go home and tell his wife to cook some food, and it ran away into the bush. When they got home they found nothing ready, and the man asked his wife why she had not done as the gazelle had told

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her. She said, 'No gazelle has come here.' And he, thinking she was lying, knocked her down and cut her throat, and she kicked out in her death struggles and expired. He then gave her the medicine to smell and hit her with the stick, but they saw she did not revive and was really dead. (b)

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One day Abunuwas took a hundred of his dinars and went to the market where he bought a fine donkey and rode it away home. One day a man came to borrow his donkey. Abunuwas said the donkey was out. At that moment the donkey brayed. The man said, 'Isn't that the donkey braying? You said it was out.' Abunuwas said, 'Now look here, have you come to borrow a donkey or have you come to borrow a bray? If you have come to borrow a bray I will bray for you.' So he brayed, 'Ee-ore, Ee-ore, Ee-ore,' and said to him 'There, get on it and go away.' (1)

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One day Abunuwas's donkey was thirsty and he had nothing to put water in to give it to drink. He went to a neighbour and said, 'Lend me a saucepan that I may give my donkey water to drink.' He was given a saucepan and went away. He kept it three days. On the fourth day he took the saucepan and put inside it a little saucepan and took it back to the owner. When the owner saw the little saucepan he said, 'This is not mine.' Abunuwas said, 'I

am not a thief. I cannot steal people's property. Your saucepan gave birth while it was with me and this is its child.'

The owner of the saucepan was very pleased and said, 'The house of Abunuwas is blessed indeed, even the saucepans bring forth there.'

Three days afterwards Abunuwas sent to borrow the saucepan again and was given it, and this time Abunuwas kept it and did not return it. The owner of the the saucepan went to ask Abunuwas for it. Abunuwas said to him, 'Your saucepan is dead.' The owner said 'Can copper die? Abunuwas said, 'Did it not bring forth?' He answered, 'It did.' Then Abunuwas said to him 'Everything that bringeth forth, its fate is to die.' And he could not answer him.

He went away and asked the learned men and they replied to him in the same way, 'Certainly, that which brings forth must also die.'

Abunuwas kept the saucepan. (*)

In a variant of this story Kibunwasi has fled to a foreign country after the adventures in the story of the three thieves told above. He borrows a saucepan because he has come without any household utensils. It is an ordinary saucepan that he borrows in the first place, but when the owner gets the small one he leaves him a much better saucepan on the second occasion. (*)

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It came to pass that Abunuwas was unpopular in the town of Baghdad. One day the great men

made mischief about him to the Sultan and wanted to destroy him by guile. So the Sultan said to him, 'Abunuwas, I want you to build me a house up in the air, and if you cannot build it you will be killed.' Abunuwas replied, 'I hear and I obey.' And he was told that the time he could have in which to build the house was three days.

He went forth into the town and he got paper and wood. He joined them together with paste and he made a big kite. He tied on to it bells and fastened it with a long string. He waited until the wind rose and then he made it fly. It flew very high and he fastened it to a tree.

The people in the town saw something in the air, and they heard the bells, and they were astonished, because they had not yet seen anything like this. Abunuwas went to the Sultan and said to him, 'I have finished building your house. Open the window and look.' The Sultan looked and Abunuwas said to him, 'Do you hear the noise?' The Sultan said, 'Yes.' And he said, 'That is the workmen making the roof and what you hear are the hammers and nails. But I am a bit short of timber. I want you to give me some and the men to take it.' The Sultan said 'Which way will the men go?' Abunuwas said, 'The same way as I went.'

The Sultan gave him the timber and the men. Abunuwas led them to the place where he had fastened the string and said, 'This is the way, pass along it.' They said, 'We cannot pass along a string.' Abunuwas said, 'You must.' They declared

they were unable to and returned to the Sultan and told him. The Sultan said, 'It is true. There is no man who can walk up a string.' Abu Nuwas said, 'Oh! you know that. Why then did you tell me to build a house in the air?' The Sultan could not reply. Abunuwas went out and loosened the string and the kite flew away.

This was the origin of kites. ⁽¹⁰⁾

In a variant of this story, which is not so good, Kibunwasi undertakes to build a high house in a day. As the Sultan was worsted by Kibunwasi, he devised the egg laying scheme, described on page 44 ⁽¹¹⁾

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There was an old man with his wife and son and they were very poor. A merchant came and said to the youth, 'If you can spend the night in a frozen lake I will give you ten thousand dinars.' As the youth was very poor he thought he would try. His mother was afraid for him so she sat and held a light for him. In the morning the youth went to the merchant and said, 'Give me the money.' The merchant refused because he said his mother had given him warmth all night. The youth went and accused him before Abunuwas and he agreed to take up his case if he were given three thousand dinars. He told the youth to accuse the merchant before the Sultan, but the Sultan told him that he had no case.

So Abunuwas bought a goat and some rice and all the accessories of a feast. He put the meat into a saucepan and the rice into another. He lit a fire and

kept the food and the fire apart. He invited people to come to a feast and included the Sultan and his Wazirs.

They came and sat round Abu Nuwas's door, and waited until the evening without even getting coffee. They were very cross. They went into the kitchen and saw that the fire and the food were apart. The Sultan said to Abunuwas, 'You are quite mad. Since morning we have sat here and we've put nothing in our bellies ;' and Abu Nuwas said, 'People are cooking, Master, but the meat is not yet done.' The Sultan went into the kitchen and saw that the meat and the rice and the fire were all apart. He said, 'This food won't get done in ten years.' Abunuwas said, 'It will.' The Sultan said, 'I know it won't, I'm going home and I shall tell everybody else to go home.' Abunuwas said, 'Don't get angry, my lord. Do you remember that youth who lay all night in a frozen pool and came with his case to you, and you said that the merchant's words were true, and that the boy had got warmth by being given a light by his mother? How should he get warmth? Please give that youth his right, because if he got warmth this food will get cooked.' The Sultan said, 'It is true,' and told the merchant to give the youth what was right. He gave it to him.

When he had done so Abunuwas ordered the food to be cooked and the people had their feast and Abunuwas got his share of the money. ⁽¹²⁾

One day Abunuwas was in want, so he said to his wife, 'Let us make a plan. I will go to the Sultan and say my wife is dead, and you go to his wife and say 'My husband is dead,' 'I know we shall get money and then we can use it.' And they went off together.

Abunuwas went to the Sultan and told him that his wife was dead. The Sultan gave him a shroud and money for the funeral, and his wife went to the queen and told her that her husband was dead, and she also was given a shroud and money for the funeral. And they went out and used it.

The Sultan went to his wife and said to her 'Abunuwas's wife is dead,' and she said to him 'Abunuwas is dead.' And they laughed and the Sultan sent men to see. And they went and found the wife of Abunuwas washing her husband and she was wearing a shroud. She said to them, 'My husband is dead.' When they wanted to put him into the shroud Abunuwas sneezed and said, 'Praise be to Allah! He makes alive that which was dead and that which is alive makes dead,' and they took him to the Sultan who said, 'Why have you cheated me Abunuwas?' He answered, 'No, it's true that this morning my wife died and I buried her. She came to life again. Now I have died, she wanted to bury me and I have come to life again.' (13)

I am indebted to my wife for the following note of a 'gag farce' or short play performed either before or after the main item, which is reminiscent of this story. 'So far as I know this farce has never been

written down but is merely carried on by tradition with of course, fresh 'gags' added from time to time. When I knew it, as performed in Ireland, it was entitled 'Who Died First.'

An old peasant and his wife were very poor. So they decided one day on a plan for making money. The peasant told his wife to go to a certain lady and say to her, 'My husband is dead' and ask for money for the funeral. Meanwhile the peasant himself would go to the lady's brother and say 'My wife is dead.' They did so, and both the brother and sister gave them money for the funeral expenses.

When the lady saw her brother she told him that this old peasant was dead, but he said, 'Oh no, it's his wife who's dead'. They argued and finally she suggested that he should go to the peasant's house and see for himself.

He went, and as he drew near the old couple saw him coming so the wife quickly lay down pulling a sheet over her and pretended to be dead. So that when the man arrived he saw what he believed to be the body of the peasant's wife and the peasant weeping over her. Satisfied he returned home and told his sister. She was still unconvinced so went off to see for herself.

When the peasant saw her coming he hastily lay down and covered himself with the sheet. So that on coming into the house she saw what she thought was the dead body of the peasant and his wife keening. She returned to her brother and told him he was mistaken. They again argued till at length they

decided to go together and find out which of them was right.

On seeing the brother and sister arriving together the old peasant said, 'We must both be dead.' So they both lay down and covered themselves with a sheet.

As the sister came in she pointed to the first body she saw saying, 'There he is.' But meanwhile her brother had seen the other body and said, 'There she is.' They looked at the two 'corpses' in amazement, and the brother laughingly said, 'Well, I'd give a five pound note to know who died first.'

Simultaneously the two 'corpses' sat up and cried with one accord 'I did,' 'I did.'

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One day Abunuwas said 'Should God offer me nine hundred and ninety-nine dollars I would not take them until they were a thousand complete.' People said, 'Is he mad that he should get nine hundred and ninety-nine dollars and not receive them?' These words spread about in the city until a merchant heard them and said he would test Abunuwas. He put nine hundred and ninety-nine dollars in a purse and left them on Abunuwas's verandah. When Abunuwas went out he saw the money and took it inside and counted it, and he gave thanks and said, 'Thanks be to God who has heard my petition for a thousand dollars, and now he has given me nine hundred and ninety-nine. Never mind, I will lend the other one to God and I am sure he will give it me some other day to make the account complete.'

The merchant went to Abunuwas and asked him if he had found the purse, and if so, how many dollars were in it. Abunuwas said 'A thousand less one.' He said, 'Well, give it to me, because you said that should God give you a thousand less one you would not take them and that they must be a thousand complete.' Abunuwas said, 'No. This is my sustenance from God, I prayed to Him for it and He gave it me. If He has given me nine hundred and ninety-nine dollars will He be defeated in giving me one dollar?' The merchant saw that Abunuwas was making trouble so he said, 'Let us go to Harun Rashid.' Abunuwas said, 'If it's like this I cannot go in this way. Give me a cloak and a turban and a donkey like yours. Then we will go to the Diwan.' The merchant agreed and they went.

When they got there the merchant spoke his complaint against Abunuwas and Harun Rashid asked Abunuwas for his answer. Abunuwas said, 'These people give me a lot of trouble. If he can tell a tale like this over the money he can easily say that this donkey is his, and the cloak is his and the turban is his.' The merchant said, 'What is this? Aren't they mine?' Abunuwas said, 'You see.' So Harun Rashid thought that it was true that they were slandering him and he decreed that Abunuwas should have everything. (14)

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One day Abunuwas was cutting a tree and he was sitting on the end of the branch and cutting at

the trunk. A man passed by and said to him, 'You are sitting in a bad position. When the branch falls you will fall with it because you are sitting on the end of it and are cutting at the trunk.' Abunuwas said, 'I shan't fall. This is the way to cut trees. I haven't started doing it to-day.' The man went on his way.

Abunuwas went on cutting and when the tree fell, he fell with it. He got up quickly and ran after the man and said to him, 'Tell me the day on which I shall die. You were able to tell me I should fall down and I have fallen down, and now I want to know when I shall die.' The man said he could not tell him but as Abunuwas pressed him he said, 'On the day on which you are riding your donkey and it throws you three times before you arrive at your destination. On that day you will die.'

Some time afterwards Abunuwas was riding his donkey to his plantation. Long before he got there he hit the donkey and it went very fast, and because it was going at such a speed it threw him. He got on again and was thrown a second time. He said, 'My death is near.' He went ahead and was thrown a third time. He lay down and covered himself with his cloth and stayed quiet like a man who is dead. He lay like that for three days and the people of the town looked for him.

On the third day a man passed by and he saw Abunuwas and asked him, 'Where is the road to Harun Rashid's place?' Abunuwas woke up and said, 'I remember that when I was alive it passed by

that mango tree until you get to the town.' The man said to him, 'Why do you say "When you were alive"?' He said, 'Yes, I am dead now,' and he lay down again. Then there passed some Bedouins on camels. When they saw Abunuwas the camels shied. The Bedouins were annoyed. They saw that it was Abu Nuwas who had made the camels shy and they beat him hard with a stick, but Abunuwas lay quiet because he was dead.

When the man who had asked the way reached Harun Rashid he was asked about Abunuwas. He said, 'He is over there asleep. He says he is dead.' Harun Rashid said, 'I know Abunuwas. If you only go and call him he won't come. Take a horn and when you get near him blow it and then say to him "Get up, the Resurrection has come".' They went and did it. Abunuwas got up and brushed himself and put on his clothes and followed them to the town.

When he got there men made fun of him, 'Abunuwas has risen again'. Some people asked him about the next world. He said, 'There's nothing in it. People only frighten you by saying "the next world is thus and thus" but it's nothing at all. There's only one thing about it, there's no eating.' And this was true, for he had not eaten for three days. And then he said, 'There's another thing that I saw which was very bad, and it was this, there are Bedouins there who are mounted on camels and if you fall foul of them they beat you very hard.'

Harun Rashid asked him about his death. He told him everything. Harun said to him, 'This man has caused you a lot of annoyance.' He said, 'No, he has not annoyed me at all. He has done me a lot of good. Now I know everything about the next world.' (15)

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Abunuwas was much disliked by the people of Baghdad because he annoyed people and they accused him to Harun Rashid. Harun ordered him to be thrown into a pit in which there was a lion. When he was in the pit he made it his business to scratch the lion until it was tame, and he lived on the meat that was thrown to the lion every day.

He stayed there for a long time until he was forgotten in the town. One day a great marvel came forth in the town. When the people woke in the morning they saw that a hand had come out of the sea with three fingers extended. They told the king and all the wise men were sent for, but nobody could interpret it and nobody could remove the hand. At last some people remembered Abunuwas and they sent for him from the pit. But before he consented to come out they had to give him clothes, a turban, a loin cloth, a vest, a shirt, and a cloak; and then they threw him a rope and he came out.

They told him what they wanted and he said, 'Give me food first.' Then Abunuwas went to the shore, and the king and crowds of people followed. He stood near the hand and he put out his own hand

in the same way as if denying something. The hand in the sea closed one finger, Abunuwas put out his hand again and the hand closed a second finger, so that there was one left, Abunuwas answered and the hand went. The people were astonished and asked the interpretation. Abunuwas said, 'The hand came to ask if there was a secret in the world between three people. I replied "No". There were left two fingers and the meaning is, "Is there a secret between two people?" There was left one and I said "Yes, a secret is only for one man," and the hand disappeared'.

The people praised Abunuwas for his intelligence and Harun Rashid gave him a house and many gifts.

After some time the king dreamed that there were jars of silver buried on the left side of the house he had given Abunuwas. He sent men to dig without giving information to Abunuwas. They dug and got nothing. When Abunuwas knew he was angry and said, 'Never mind, I will have my revenge.' He told his wife to cook rice and chicken and then told her to go for a walk. He took a plate and a basin for the gravy and put them on a tray under the table and covered them with a white cloth. Then he locked up the house and put the key over the door and went away.

On the road he met three youths and said to them, 'I know you young men are very troublesome these days. When you go by my house do not go and take the key over the door and open the house

and look under the table and see a plate of rice and chicken, or eat and cover the plate and the basin with the tray without washing them,' The young men thought that the words of Abunuwas were remarkable, but they went to the house and did all the things that he had told them not to and went away.

Abunuwas gave them sufficient time to eat, and when they had finished he went home and saw what they had done. He took the tray and the plate covered in the same way to Harun Rashid and he said, 'There are people I accuse of eating my rice,' and Harun asked, 'Where are they?' and Abunuwas replied, 'I have covered them in the plate'. He uncovered it and there came out three flies which flew away. He said, 'These are they that I accuse.' The king said; 'Abunuwas, do you accuse even flies?' He replied, 'It is even they that have done me wrong. If they did not do me wrong I could not accuse them and I wish you to give me justice according to law.'

The king replied, 'I give you permission that everywhere you see a fly has settled you may strike it,' and he gave him a writing under his hand.

Abunuwas made a heavy stick with a big knob on the end. As he went round the shops, if he saw flies settled on dates, he would strike them and scatter the dates everywhere. If he saw them on dried shark he would strike the shark and flatten it, and when people raised a commotion because he damaged their goods Abunuwas used to say, 'I do not hit the goods,

I hit the flies.' And he went on like this for a long time.

At last one day Abunuwas said to his wife, 'To day I will take my revenge for my house being dug up.' He went to the king's diwan with his stick and sat down near the king. When the conversation was in full swing there came a fly which settled on the king's thigh. Abunuwas took his stick and he hit the king with it on his thigh, — vengeance for having his house dug up. The people seized Abunuwas and wanted to imprison him, but he said, 'If you imprison me you only do it to annoy me, because I didn't strike the king, I struck the fly which settled on him, and he himself has given me permission in this writing under his hand to strike every fly wherever I see one settle.' They examined Abunuwas's writing and saw it was true so they let him go. He went home to his house. ⁽¹⁶⁾

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There was a man who went on a journey and he had a cow, and before he left he took his cow to a big man in the town, and that man had a bull. While the man was on the journey his cow calved seven times. When he came back he went to fetch his cow and he had heard that his cow had calved. When he got there he said, 'I want my cow and its calves.' The old man replied, 'Go to the pen and take that cow of yours which you left behind.' The man said, 'And how can that be when my cow has calved?' The old man replied, 'It is my bull which has calved.'

When yours came it had no calf, and now take it itself.'

The man was grieved and went to Abunuwas who agreed to help him. Abunuwas dressed himself up as a poor man and went to the old man with much weeping and said, 'Lend me three rupees so that I may help my father who has just given birth.' The old man said, 'Don't make fun of me. If your mother has given birth I will give them to you.' Abunuwas said, 'No master, it's my father who has given birth.' The old man replied, 'I have never yet heard of a man giving birth.' Abunuwas said, 'Well you hear it to-day,' but the old man wouldn't agree. So Abunuwas said, 'If a man doesn't give birth how is it that you have cheated this poor fellow of his oxen? You say that it is your ox that has given birth and it is a bull. It would have been better if you had said that you had wanted a fee for looking after the cow.' The man could make no answer to Abunuwas and he gave him all seven calves. (11)

In a variant of this story it is a question of goats not oxen, and it is the Sultan who cheats the poor man. (12)

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One day a merchant killed a goat. At the time of cooking there came a beggar and by way of feeding he sat down to the leeward of the food so that he got the smell. In the morning the beggar met the merchant and said to him, 'Master, you were very good to me yesterday. I was nourished on the smell of

your goat until I was well fed'. The merchant said, 'That's it.' That's why my goat was tasteless, because you took all the flavour', and he went and accused him before Harun Rashid, who was very fond of merchants and ordered the beggar to pay twelve rupees.

The beggar went and cried, for he had no money. He met Abunuwas who said he would help him and gave him twelve rupees telling him not to pay it until he himself should come. In the morning they met before the Sultan. When the beggar stood forth to pay, Abunuwas said, 'You have your twelve rupees?' He answered, 'I have them'. Abunuwas took them and called the merchant to fetch them. When the merchant wanted to receive them Abunuwas said 'Wait' and flung them on the floor saying, 'There you are, take the chink of these rupees because the beggar didn't eat the meat but only had the smell'. The merchant was astonished at the wisdom of Abunuwas and was defeated.

Abunuwas left the twelve rupees for the beggar and went home. (19)

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Once upon a time there was a tom-cat, and he went out for a walk and met a very beautiful she-cat. So he went home, but in the evening he went to the tabby-cat's house, and knocked at the door. The she-cat called out, 'Who are you?' 'It is I', he answered. 'Who are you?' she said. 'I am the child of Panduma Kame', he replied. 'My brother!', she exclaimed. She unfastened the door and came out, and he said, 'Now

I am going to scratch you'. She ran away and he followed her, but he did not catch her, so he returned home to his house, and she also went home.

The next day he did the same, and got hold of her, but she shrieked and the owner came out, whereupon the tom-cat scratched him and ran away.

The owner of the she-cat felt very bitter, but he could not catch the tom-cat, and wondered what cat it was. He returned inside and shut up the she-cat. The next day the tom-cat did not come, but on the fourth day he came and got into the fowl-house, where he ate two small chickens. The fowls made such a noise that the owner came out and saw the cat, which ran away.

He went among his friends and said, 'There is a cat round here that is a great trouble to me', and he told them all it had done. One of his friends, called **Kibunwasi**, said, 'I have a rat-trap which I will lend you ; it is a big rat-trap'. And he explained to him how he should put his hand in to prepare the bait. The owner of the cat took the trap home and followed out **Kibunwasi's** instructions, so that the trap caught him by the hand and he could not get it out again. There were no other houses near his, and no one heard his cries and he died, and **Kibunwasi** got his property.

Kibunwasi took everything of his and sold them, after which he went to another town on the mainland. After some time the dead man's relations came and found out what had happened, and were told that the trap was **Kibunwasi's** idea. **Kibunwasi**, who was on

the mainland, heard of this, so he journeyed farther away. When he was a distance of two days away he wanted meat, so he caught a gazelle, and taking it with him, went on his way. Presently he met a lion, who said, 'Kibunwasi, your time is finished. Give the gazelle to the dogs to eat (for Kibunwasi had two dogs with him), you eat the dogs and I will eat you'. Kibunwasi was very afraid, but he gave the gazelle to the dogs, and then a big frog came out, and puffing his cheeks up to an enormous size, asked what all the trouble was about. Kibunwasi told him, and the frog said, 'Yes, do it quickly, and I will then eat him'. And he blew himself out to such an extent that the lion said, 'Yes, it is true, I think he will eat me.' So he went away, and the frog told Kibunwasi, 'You are safe now, I can't eat you ; take your property and go.' (20)

There was a merchant who made a big well and all the people of the town took water from that well. Every morning they saw that the water was much less. So they went and told the merchant that every morning there was no water and they could not get any. So the merchant sent for the police.

At night Kibunwasi came and called out 'Friend, friend, give me water and I will give you some good food. But I cannot give you this food unless I tie you up as it will make you fall down.' The policeman agreed and he was tied up, and then Kibunwasi took all the water out of the well and said, 'You thought that you were very clever and that you could catch me.'

The next day the merchant brought the corporal to see the policeman, and when he came he saw that the policeman was tied up, and he asked him, 'How did he tie you up?' The policeman answered, 'He cheated me, he told me that he had some good food'. The merchant saw that he was a big fool.

On the second day the merchant took another policeman who went and stood in the well. When Kibunwasi came at night he brought honey with him and called out, 'Friend, friend', but the policeman did not answer. The third time Kibunwasi called, the policeman replied and Kibunwasi said 'You do not know what a good thing I've brought'. The policeman came out and said, 'What have you brought me?' Kibunwasi shewed him some very fine red honey in a calabash. The policeman said, 'Give me a little to taste'. Kibunwasi put his finger in the honey and smeared a little on each side of the policeman's mouth. The policeman licked it and found it was very sweet. He said, 'Give me some more'. Kibunwasi said, 'This stuff is so sweet that I must first tie you up tightly so that you don't fall down'. He tied him up much much tighter than the man he had tied up before, and then he took the water and went away.

When the Corporal came in the morning and saw the policeman he said, 'What sort of a man is it who comes and ties you up?' The policeman replied, 'He's a very small man but he's very cunning and he has very sweet things'. So the Corporal took him before the merchant and reported the matter.

The Sergeant heard about it and made a plan

to get some bird-lime. They made the bird-lime and they got a big pot of it. They got some soot and made the bird-lime black and they took it and put it in the well.

In the night Kibunwasi came and brought the honey with him. He called out 'Friend, friend,' and nobody answered him. And he said, 'Answer me, I've got some very good food,' but there was no answer. He took the honey and licked and said, 'It's so sweet that even I am overcome with it. Speak and I will give you some.' No answer. He thought, to-day it's very fine there's no one here. He got into the well. When he got to the water he put one foot in. When he wanted to move it he found he could not. He called out, 'Let me go, I'll give you what I've got.' Nothing happened. He was very angry. He kicked with the other foot which was caught in the same way. He said, 'Let me go or I shall hit you very hard.' He hit out with his fist, it was caught in the same way. He said, 'All my strength is in my right hand. If I hit you with this you may die'. He hit, and it was caught in the same way. He said, 'Let me go or I'll hit you with my head and that's got more strength than anything.' When he hit with his head it was stuck in the same way until the morning.

When the sergeant came in the morning he saw Kibunwasi was caught in the well. He was taken out to be brought to the merchant. He was so wily that everybody was afraid to let him go and said it was better to kill him at once. Kibunwasi said, 'If

you want to kill me you mustn't shoot me with a gun, I shan't die.' He said, 'If you want to kill me you must tie me with banana rope and put me in the sun.'

So they beat a drum to summon all the people of that country to see Kibunwasi die. He was tied up with that rope and put in the sun. He said, 'If you see me move when the sun comes out don't touch me. That's my spirit going.' So he lay there. The sun shone. So he stretched himself and broke the cords. When he was quite free of the cords he got up and waved a salaam and ran away.

The above story is really one of the hare or rabbit and is common in many countries. In one variant the part of the Merchant is taken by a body of animals who dug a well in the dry season. As the rabbit refused to help saying he had very sweet water of his own, he was not allowed to share. The parts of the first and second policemen are taken by the Hyena and the Lion and it is the turtle who catches the rabbit by sinking himself below the water and catching his leg when he comes. The rabbit makes his escape by proposing the same method of being tied up as Kibunwasi does, but the reason given is that such a treatment will make him fat and tasty for being eaten. ⁽¹⁾

In the case of Kibunwasi the reason he gives for not being shot with a gun would be credible, for Balder stories are not uncommon in East Africa. Compare the tale of Liongo in Steere's Swahili tales

and Sir J. G. Fraser's 'Balder the Beautiful in the Golden Bough.

In a Mauritian version there is a king who has a bathing pool. For three mornings the water is dirty and the guardian, after the threats of the king as to what will happen if it occurs again, wait up at night and meets the hare. The hare tempts him with drugged honey and dirties the water. The guardian runs away and the king proclaims with trumpet his need for another guardian saying that if the water is dirtied the guardian will lose his head. Every animal — the cock, the dog and the goose are mentioned — is afraid to take the job but after a week a tortoise volunteers. He has himself covered with tar and settles down by the side of the pool. The hare comes, takes the tortoise for a stone bench put there to sit on and sits down. The tortoise moves slightly. The hare tries to move. Stuck! The tortoise says, 'What do you think? For my part I think that this trip you are well caught' and starts walking off to the king. The hare kicks with his hind paws, with his fore paws and then hits with his head. All are stuck. It is worth noting that in the Creole version the threats of the hare and his statement as to his fore-paws and head being more powerful are almost word for word the same as those of Kibunwasi addressing his imagined adversary in the well.

The king cuts off the hare's head and sends him to the kitchen. Baissac states he collected seven versions of this tale in Mauritius and refers to a

Martinique version. He says that the hare more often than not comes to a bad end, but sometimes manages to get away and the tortoise loses his head. (22)

In the Thonga version it is the chief's water hole which is made muddy. The first guardian is the Monitor and the second the Antelope. The hare defeats them by inviting them to till a field with him. He ties a hoe on to the fore-paw of the Monitor and on to the fore-leg of the Antelope in turn which effectually prevents them moving. He then helps himself to the water and dirties it. The Tortoise, who is the third guardian, declines to hoe but later agrees to dig up and eat some of the wild boars' sweet potatoes. While the hare is gathering the potatoes the Tortoise gets into his wallet, puts them in the wallet and runs away, thinking it has left the Tortoise. The Tortoise, however, eats the potatoes and the hare is thus defeated. (23)

The story is no doubt related to that of the Tar Baby, of which the Cape Verde version is as follows:—

There was a wolf with a nephew. They worked on the land together. When the crops were ripe, Nephew found something stolen from the land each day. Nephew said, 'I believe it's you stealing there, my Uncle Wolf.' Uncle Wolf said to him, 'No, it's not me, it's other people.' Sir Wolf stole, stole, until almost everything was gone from the land. Nephew went to see a *saib*; he asked him, 'How can I catch my Uncle Wolf?' — 'Make a figure of tar, put it in

the middle of the land.' Next day Uncle Wolf came, he met the tar figure. He asked, 'What are you doing here? It's you stealing on our land.' The tar figure did not answer him. Wolf said, 'You needn't speak. I'm going to knock you down, I'm going to keep you here until Nephew comes.' He gave a punch with his right hand, his right hand stuck. He said, 'If you want to fight with me, let my hand go!' The figure did not stir. 'I have another hand,' said Wolf, and he gave him one with his left hand. His left hand stuck. He kicked him with his right foot, his foot stuck. 'Oh, you're fighting well! I've still a foot.' He kicked him with his left foot, his left foot stuck. 'You've got my foot, but I'm going to butt you with my belly.' He gave it to him with his belly, his belly stuck. Oh, you're doing well! but I'm going to bite you.' He bit, his teeth stuck. At eight o'clock Nephew came by. Wolf said to him, 'I was watching for this fellow who was stealing on our land, Nephew; I caught him, he caught me too.' — 'I'm glad you've got the man, my Uncle Wolf. Now I'm going to set fire to him to burn him up.' 'Don't set fire to him!' begged Wolf; 'if you burn him, you'll kill your Uncle Wolf too.' — 'I can't help it, my Uncle; I can't get you two apart, I've got to burn you both.' Nephew set fire to the tar figure. That was the end of Uncle Wolf. (24)

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Banawasi was a neighbour of the king. Every day when people went to the Diwan he went also. The Wazir stood forth and said, 'O thou our king,

dost thou not know that Banawasi is a man of no account. He will make a lot of trouble in the town.' And the king said, 'It does not matter.'

Now that king was very fond of Banawasi because of his jests, until one day when they were at the Diwan the king called 'O Wazir.' The Wazir answered, 'Here am I,' and went and stooped over the king who whispered in his ear, and Banawasi wanted very much to be treated like that, and said, 'O king, I dreamed that every day you ought to call me and whisper to me, even if you have nothing to say.' The king said, 'Certainly, Banawasi.'

The next morning when he got to the Diwan the king called for him. He went to the king and the king whispered nothing but a joke in his ear. Banawasi, however, said aloud, 'God willing, I will do all that you have told me.' The people were troubled and the wazir said, 'Well, I told the king a long time ago that Banawasi was a man of no account, and now everything in the town will go wrong.' And the King said, 'Well what shall I do to get rid of Banawasi?' The youngest there said to him, 'Arrange that every man who comes here to-morrow has an egg wrapped in his girdle, and when the Diwan is over you must say "everybody who is present must lay an egg, and if anyone doesn't lay it, I will kill him." Banawasi doesn't know of this so he will be defeated and he will die.'

The king did as he suggested, and when he made his edict the next morning everybody except Banawasi produced an egg. The king said to Bana-

wasi, 'This is no joke. If you don't produce an egg you shall die.' Banawasi replied, 'The reason I haven't laid an egg is that all these people are hens and I am the cock.' The king was defeated and told him he could go.

Then the youngest present said, 'To-morrow when Banawasi comes tell him to sew up a quern.' So the king did this and Banawasi said, 'Put your stone on the verandah tomorrow and I will do it.' Everybody was astonished.

The next day he came with his cap full of small stones and said 'Give me my work to do.' The king replied, 'The job I want done is what I told you yesterday.' Banawasi said, 'If clothes are torn they are sewn with cotton thread. If bags are split they are sewn with packing thread. When a bag of matting is torn it is mended with fibre, and this is a quern which has broken so I have brought a thread of stone, and if you will twist it I will sew.' The King replied, 'O you Banawasi, has stone a thread?' Banawasi said, 'When you told me to sew a stone did you not know that nobody could do that, and if there is such a man, well, you twist my thread of pebbles.' The king was defeated.

Banawasi went home, and the youngest present then said, 'You remember that Banawasi has got a spotted ox. Borrow it and slaughter it.' The king did so and sent some of the meat to Banawasi and told him it was from his ox. Banawasi said, 'It doesn't matter but give me the skin.'

He took the skin away, and quite by accident

went to a place where there was a lot of money. He took the money, threw the skin away, went back to the town in a few days. The people were very surprised and asked him where he got it. He said he got it by selling his skin. So the people slaughtered their animals until there was nothing left alive in the town. When they were going off to sell their skins Banawasi said, 'Follow the southern road until you come to a big town. When you are asked what you are carrying say' "We are carrying 'Them'."

They went, but they got lost and they came to a king's town and a soldier asked them 'What are you carrying?' They said, 'Them'. They were asked, 'What is "Them"?' One of them said, 'We'd better say it's skins or we shall get into trouble.' So they said so. When they said this they were beaten and they ran back home and laid their complaint before the king. Banawasi was sent for and said, 'They are fools. I told them only to say "Them".'

Then the king ordered Banawasi's house to be burned. Banawasi took the ashes and went to the Customs where he stole a boat and got to a large town, and he had only five rupees with him. On the shore he took another boat and hid the rupees in it and sank it. Then he landed and found the son of the king and the son of the wazir of that place in another boat, and he took them to the king and said, 'I am a poor man and I have come here with the property of an Indian, 3,500 lbs. of silver.'

The king said, 'If millet is split the grains are visible,' and sent men to search for the boat. Sol-

diers went and found the boat and one rupee. The king said, 'It seems probable that you are speaking the truth,' so he and the wazir paid over the silver.

Banawasi went back home and the king asked him where he got all the money. He said, 'It comes from the ashes of that burnt house of mine.' The king said, 'Let us burn our houses'. Banawasi told him, 'Burn the whole town.' So he burnt it and put all the ashes in sacks.

On the day they were going to set out, Banawasi said he was ill but told them to go in a large ship until they reached a town, and when they were asked what they were carrying they were to say, 'We are carrying "it",' and not to say 'ashes'.

So they sailed for six days and on the seventh they came to the town of a very fierce king, and finally they had to tell the soldiers that it was ashes and every man was ordered to receive twenty strokes.

When they got back the king sent for Banawasi and said, 'You shall be drowned in the sea.' So he was put in a sack and given to the fishermen who were told to drown him. But the fishermen did not drown Banawasi but put him on a desert island. Banawasi said, 'Help me in the drought and I will pay you back in the rain. Get me some paper and ink and a tarred bag,' and they got them and gave them to him. Banawasi said, 'My friends, at the end of this month I shall be king and one of you will be my commander-in-chief and my wazir.' The fishermen did not believe him and left him.

Banawasi forged letters, one from the king's father and one from his mother and one from his grandfather who had all been dead for a long time, so long that even Banawasi had not known them, and he also forged letters from the wazir's father and all his relations and put them in the bag. When the fishermen came again he went on board with them, and when they reached the harbour near the quay he dived overboard.

Now at the Customs there was a crowd of people and when Banawasi came up there they were astonished and said, 'Is it really you?' So he said, 'Who do you think I am?' And they said, 'But you were drowned.' He said, 'I wasn't drowned, I was sent for a walk,' and he took out the letters and gave them to the king, who was in his office at the Customs and had seen everything, and he gave letters to the wazir and to all his enemies.

When they got these letters everybody read them and the king said, 'Banawasi must really have been to Ghostland, because he never knew my father or my mother, and this letter is from my father.' So he called for him and asked him what the other world was like. Banawasi said it was beautiful, 'There are beautiful perfumes, and everything is there, and if you go you will not want to return.'

So the king said he would go, and took with him the wazir and his son and everybody who was in the business. They went on a ship for three days and Banawasi said here was the way to Ghostland. So Banawasi stopped the ship and went overboard

with some dates and betel and other good things which he has hidden on himself. He swam under water and hid under the rudder. In about an hour he called out to them and they lowered the ladder and he climbed up and said, 'Here are the presents I have brought from the other world.'

The king said he wanted to go quickly so he was tied to the Anchor and sent overboard, and the wazir said he wanted to go to join the king. Banawasi said, 'Yes, it's you I want to go quickest of all.' So he was tied to a stone with his son and the king's two sons and Banawasi sent all his foes to the next world. So they went back and Banawasi became king and made trouble for everybody as he wanted to.

And this is the story of Banawasi. ("")



NOTES

I. THE ACTUAL.

1. Other authorities say he was born in 762. It is generally agreed that he died in 810.
2. Masudi — *Les Prairies d'Or* — Barbier de Meynard et Pavet de Courteille. Paris, 1861. II. 114. There is an alternative reading of 'demons' for 'camels'.
3. Masudi, *op. cit.*, VII. 80.
4. Masudi, *op. cit.* VIII. 407-409. 'Spring' in the fourth line from the end is strange, considering the apples and the lemons. The word used is *Rabia*, which can also mean autumn, but the spirit of the lines seems more that of spring.
5. Masudi, *op. cit.*, VIII. 386-390.
6. Masudi, *op. cit.*, VIII. 319.
7. Ibn Khallikan — *Biographical Dictionary* — II. 43.
8. Masudi, *op. cit.*, II. 350. The text is obscure and the metaphor strange. Another reading has for the last two lines :—
And the sight our fires round the fortress made,
Was like that of torches on faggots laid.
9. Masudi, *op. cit.*, VI. 403. These verses are also attributed to Abu Hazrat al-Arabi. Rebi's clan, of course, refers to al-Fadhli bin Rebi who succeeded to the Wazirate on the fall of Yahya bin Khaled the Barmecide.
10. Translation of E. Powys Mathers from the Arabian Nights. See J. C. Mardrus — *Le Livre des Mille Nuits et une Nuit* — Paris 1899 ff. VIII (Luxe edition) 313. Mardrus's translation is said to be professedly from the Bulaq edition, unfaithful to an extensive degree and to represent no known Arabic text.
11. E. H. Palmer — *Haroun Al-Raschid, Caliph of Baghdad* — London, 1881. 212. See also R. A. Nicholson — *A literary history of the Arabs*. Cambridge, 1930, 345.
12. Palmer, *op. cit.*, 214.
13. Masudi, *op. cit.*, VI. 331-333.

14. Masudi, *op. cit.*, VI. 245. The provision of the second line was no doubt more difficult in the original.
15. René Basset—*Mille et Un' Contes*. *Récits et Légendes Arabes*—Paris, 1924. I. 379. quoting from Kosegarten—*Chrestomathia arabica*—168-169.
16. Translated from the Latin of Sir William Jones—*Collected Works*—London, 1799. II. 450.
17. The Syrian month corresponding to September. The Accadian Ululu and the Hebrew Elul.
18. Masudi, *op. cit.*, III. 403.
19. Masudi, *op. cit.*, III. 411. The original is in the metre called Munsarib.
20. The following are editions of his works :—
Diwan—collected by Abu Bibr Muhammad al-Suli. Bulak, 1860.
Diwan—Beirut, 1884.
Diwan—edited by Isma'il al-Nabhari. Cairo, 1904.
W. Ahlwardt began an edition of his *Diwan* under the title *Diwan des Abu Nowas nach der Wiener und Berliner Handschrift, mit Benutzung anderer Handschriften herausgegeben.*, but only one volume, I. *Die Weinlieder*, appeared. (Greifswald, 1861).
A selection of his poems were translated into German by A. von Kremer. (Vienna, 1855).
See also I. Goldziher—*Abhandlungen zur Arabischen Philologie*—(Leyden, 1896. I. 145 ff.)
21. Nicholson, *op. cit.*, 286, 292-296. I know of no other work which so clearly and so attractively depicts the place of Abu Nuwas and the other poets of the Harunic cycle in the general scheme of Arab Literature.
Abu Nuwas's teacher at Kufa was Khalaf al-Ahmar, of the school of Hammad al-Rawiya. Both of them were clever imitators of the ancient poets and as professional reciters made a practice of fathering their own verse on celebrated bygone bards. So skilful did Khalaf become at this that when in his old age he confessed to having composed several poems which he had previously attributed to others, he was not believed by the scholars of Basra and Kufa. The facts are

worth mentioning as it may be that the tuition of Khalaf had some influence in the revolt of Abu Nuwas against the old traditions.

II. THE APOCRYPHAL.

1. Except where otherwise stated I have used Burton's translation of the Arabian Nights, and most of the verses given here as coming from the Arabian Nights are Burton's translations. I must admit responsibility for the verses in translations other than those by Burton, Palmer or Powys Mathers.
2. Mardrus, *op. cit.*, III. 140-141.
3. Mardrus, *op. cit.*, IV. 90.
4. Mardrus, *op. cit.* V. 286.
5. See also Khati Cheghlou — *Histoires Arabes* — Paris, 1927. 235
6. Mardrus, *op. cit.*, IV. 76.
7. Mardrus, *op. cit.*, IV. 107.
8. Mardrus, *op. cit.*, III. 162, 193. IV. 76-77.
9. Palmer, *op. cit.*, 149 — 151. Palmer composed a version of this story in verse which is given in Sir Walter Besant's *Life of Edward Henry Palmer*, London 1883, and runs as follows :

One fine evening the Caliph
 Had indulged in heavy wet,
 Till he didn't know an alif (1)
 From the neighbouring minaret ;
 And awaking on the morrow,
 With (what all must feel at times)
 Red-hot coppers, thought with sorrow
 On his fellow-creatures' crimes.
 'Shall not Allah's own vicegerent,
 Said he, 'break the drunkard's glass
 Crush in man this vice inherent ?
 Here, you sot Abu Nuwas !

(1) The proverb quoted, 'Ma ya'rifsh al alif minnal madneh,' is equivalent to the English, 'He doesn't know big B from a bull's foot.'

'My great clemency prevailing,
Grants to thee the choice to make
'Twixt beheading and impaling
Shall it be a chop or stake ?'

But the still undaunted poet
Takes it all for pleasant fun.
'How your Majesty does go it !
May I ask what I have done ?'

'Done !' the Caliph cried with curses :
'Is it not thy wont to sing
Dissipated doggrel verses,
Bidding men the wine cup bring ?'

'I suspect from your condition
Men do bring it very oft.'
'Would you slay me on suspicion ?'
Asks the bard in accents soft.

'Then religion, too, you scoff at ;
Here, for instance, when you say,
'Come along, my noble Prophet.
We will fight with fate to-day !''

'Well, and did we ?' asked the poet.
'How should I know ?' said the King.
'Then, when you yourself don't know it,
Would you kill me for a thing ?'

'Cease,' cried Haroun, 'this contention :
Thou hast often in thy verse
Owned to things too bad to mention.
And deserving death or worse !'

'Allah told us long ago that
What I say I never do ;
And your Majesty must know that,
Since you've read your Koran through,

“The erring follow in the Poet’s way :
 Seo’st thou not how in each vale they stray ?
 And how they never do the things they say.”

This Koranic erudition
 Left the King no more to say ;
 So the other with submission
 Took the chance to slip away.

Reader ! it should make us humbler
 When of men like this we read.
 Let us take another tumbler,
 Just to drink to er Rashid.

10. Khati Cheghlou, *op. cit.*, 167.
11. Khati Cheghlou, *op. cit.*, 24.
12. Khati Cheghlou, *op. cit.*, 36.
13. Khati Cheghlou, *op. cit.*, 266.
14. Mardrus, *op. cit.*, IV. 106.
15. Khati Cheghlou, *op. cit.*, 184-185. See also Palmer, *op. cit.*, 200-203.
16. Khati Cheghlou, *op. cit.*, 179-180.
17. Khati Cheghlou, *op. cit.*, 188-189.
18. Khati Cheghlou, *op. cit.*, 188.
19. Khati Cheghlou, *op. cit.*, 186.
20. Khati Cheghlou, *op. cit.*, 182.
21. Khati Cheghlou, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*
22. Khati Cheghlou, *op. cit.*, 181.
23. Khati Cheghlou, *op. cit.*, 190. In the original the pun is on *dha'a* and *dhaa* and the alteration is made by changing *ain* into *hamza*.
24. Khati Cheghlou, *op. cit.*, 203-204.
25. Khati Cheghlou, *op. cit.*, 191-192.
26. Basset, *op. cit.* I. 331, quoting Nozhat al-Jallas fi Akhbar Abu Nuwas, p. 8. He says the same tale is related in a more realistic way in B. Meissner — *Neuarabische Geschichten aus dem Iraq* — No. XXXII. p. 72 ; the people are Harun al-Rashid, Queen Zobeidah and Abu Nuwas. Cf. also this form

of excuse as a maxim in *Freylag-Proverbia arabica*. III. 327. No. 1968 ; Socin, *Arabische Sprichwörter* — No. 380, p. 10 of the Arabic text.

The story is also told in Khati Cheghlou, *op. cit.*, 189-190, and Palmer, *op. cit.*, 147.

27. Palmer, *op. cit.*, 149. See also Ingrams — *Zanzibar, its History and Its People*, London, 1931. 387, and in Part III of this volume.
28. Palmer, *op. cit.*, 149.
29. Khati Cheghlou. *op. cit.*, 186.
30. Khati Cheghlou, *op. cit.*, 189.
31. Khati Cheghlou, *op. cit.*, 174.
32. Khati Cheghlou, *op. cit.*, 173.
33. Basset, *op. cit.*, I. 336. quoting Nozhat al-Jallas, p. 22. He says the same tale is given abridged in Ah'med al-Ibshihi — *Kitab al-Mostratraf*, I. 190 ; II. 650.

III. THE MYTHICAL.

1. See Ingrams, *op. cit.*, 226, 350. Punch as we know him, has his origin in the Italian Policinella, but Kargoss is very definitely Punch and of Persian origin. It seems to me not unlikely that Policinella arrived in Italy from the East with the gypsies. As regards Banawasi see M. W. H. Beech — *Aids to the Study of Kiswahili* — London, N. D. 58.
2. See the tale of 'Masrur the Eunuch and Ibn al-Karibi.'
3. [Samwil Chiponde] — *Hekaya za Abunuwas na Hadithi nyin-gine* — Zanzibar 1915. 55.
4. Khati Cheghlou, *op. cit.*, 144-145.
5. Chiponde, *op. cit.*, 56.
6. Ingrams, *op. cit.*, 387-389.
7. Chiponde, *op. cit.*, 57.
8. Chiponde, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*
9. Ingrams, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*
10. Chiponde, *op. cit.*, 58-59.
11. Ingrams, *op. cit.*, 386-387.
12. Chiponde, *op. cit.*, 59-61.
13. Chiponde, *op. cit.*, 61-62.
14. Chiponde, *op. cit.*, 62-63.

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15. Chiponde, *op. cit.*, 64-66.
16. Chiponde *op. cit.*, 66-70.
17. Chiponde, *op. cit.*, 70-71.
18. Ingrams, *op. cit.*, 386.
19. Chiponde, *op. cit.*, 71-72.
20. Ingrams, *op. cit.*, 389-391.
21. Ingrams, *op. cit.*, 384-385.
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