

**ARABIC PROVERBS**

OF THE

**MODERN EGYPTIANS.**

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حرف الالف

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No. 1.

الف دقتك ولا سلام عليك

*A thousand raps at the door, but no salute or invitation from within.*

This is said of a person's fruitless endeavours to become intimate with another.

2.

الف قفا ولا قفاي

*(Let them strike or slap) a thousand necks, but not mine.*

Among the Arabs it is usual to strike the neck (قفا) and not the ears. A blow on the neck is considered a much greater affront

B

than a slap on the face. Not only the neck, but a blow struck upon the neck, is expressed in the Egyptian dialect by **قنا**. Thus “I struck him a blow on his neck,” (**ضربتته قنا**) is exactly equivalent in its meaning to the English phrase “I boxed his ears.”

## 3.

الف كركي في الجو ما تعوض عصفور في الكف

*A thousand cranes in the air are not worth one sparrow in the fist.*

The crane كركي is a bird common in the Delta, particularly about the Lake of Menzaleh. **كف** properly signifies the “hand,” or “palm of the hand;” but in Egypt is generally used for the “fist.”

## 4.

إذا كان القمر معك لا تبالي بالنجوم

*If the moon be with thee, thou needest not to care about the stars.*

## 5.

إذا كان معك نجس لا تسببه ببيك انجس منه

*If a worthless fellow be with thee, do not let him go, or else one worse will come to thee.*

The general meaning is, that we should bear present ills rather than, by endeavouring to remove them, expose ourselves to greater. This saying is often quoted with respect to servants, whose dishonesty and insolence are subjects of universal complaint throughout Egypt. The word **يسبب** in common acceptation signifies “to leave a thing, to let it go out of one’s hands.” The word **نجس** is used in Egypt to express a low, disorderly, unprincipled character—a base, worthless fellow.

## ARABIC PROVERBS.

3

6.

إذا كانت العماميم تشتكي الغسة ايش يكون حال الألبسة

*If the turbans complain of a slight wind, what must be the state of the inner drawers?*

This proverb is quoted when the citizens of Cairo murmur at oppression, the peasants having much greater reason for being discontented. الغسة flatus,—ايش in the Egyptian dialect used for البسة, plural of لباس, drawers worn under the great trowsers.—اي شي

7.

إذا كان زوجي راضي ايش فضول القاضي

*If my husband consent, why should the kadhy's interference be necessary?*

This means in general, that when two parties who have contended agree to be reconciled, the arbitration of a third person is not requisite. But the saying more particularly alludes to divorces, which in many cases are determined by the kadhy. فضول in the Egyptian dialect, signifies—the meddling, officious interference of a third person.

8.

إذا نسيت الحمد تصلي بایش

*If thou forgettest to say "Praise be to God," in what other words wilt thou pray?*

This is addressed to persons who neglect the principal object or part of their business, and execute only that which is the least important. الحمد means the expression الحمد لله, which commences the *Fateha*, or first chapter of the Koran, and should be recited in every prayer. بایش in the Egyptian dialect for اي شي. The Egyptians always put this after the verb in interrogations, as تصلي بایش —whilst the Syrians invariably place it before, and say بایش تصلي

B 2

## ARABIC PROVERBS.

## 9.

إذا كرهك جارك غير باب دارك

*If thy neighbour dislike thee, change the gate of thy house.*

The intimacy with neighbours is much greater in the East than in Europe; and the repose of a family often depends upon the harmony subsisting between it and those who occupy the adjoining house.

## 10.

إذا حلق جارك بل انت

*If thy neighbour shaves (somebody), do thou soak (the head of the person whom he shaves).*

Always endeavour to act agreeably to the wishes of thy neighbour. **يبيل** to wet, meaning here to wet the head with a lather of soap before the application of a razor.

## 11.

إذا اراد ربنا هلاك نملة انبت لها اجنحة

*If God purposes the destruction of an ant, he allows wings to grow upon her.*

The sudden elevation of persons to stations above their means or capacities, may often cause their ruin.

## 12.

إذا رأيت اعور عبر اقلب حجر

*If thou seest a one-eyed person pass by, turn up a stone.*

The people of Cairo turn up a stone or break a water-jar behind the back of any person whom they dislike, just on his leaving them, hoping thereby to prevent his return; this is a kind of incantation. The term *one-eyed* here expresses a person disagreeable on any

## ARABIC PROVERBS.

5

account. The Arabs regard a one-eyed man as of bad omen (شوم), and nobody wishes to meet him.

## 13.

إذا رأيت حيط مائل هروا من تحتها

*If thou seest a wall inclining, run from under it.*

Fly from him whose power is tottering, or whom dangers threaten. In the Egyptian dialect حيط is used for حايط.

## 14.

إذا كثرت الالوان أعرف انها من بيوت الجيران

*If the dishes increase in number, it becomes known that they are from the houses of neighbours.*

In the East, neighbours frequently supply the wants of their friend's kitchen on occasion of family feasts. This saying implies that when a person makes too expensive an entertainment, it is evident that he has borrowed from others. لون (in the plural الوان) means not only "a colour," but, among the Egyptians, a dish of dressed victuals.

## 15.

إذا كثرت النواتية غرقت الركب

*If the sailors become too numerous, the ship sinks.*

كثرت instead of كثرت. The ث is seldom pronounced in Egypt.

## 16.

لذا حبتك حبة اطوق بها

*If a serpent love thee, wear him as a necklace.*

If dangerous people show affection towards thee, court their friendship by the most polite attention.

17.

إذا انكسر الجمل حمل حمل حمار

*If thy camel break down, put on an ass-load.*

Suit thy business to thy circumstances.

18.

إذا كان الكفن مخرّج و الغاسل اعور و الدكة مكسورة و الارض سبخة يكون الميت  
 من اهل جهنم

*If the winding-sheet be ragged, and the corpse-washer one-eyed, and the bier broken, and the burial-ground a saltish soil, then truly the deceased must belong to the inhabitants of hell.*

If every thing in a person's business goes wrong, he must be totally ruined at last. *دكة* is properly a stand or frame on which the coffin rests before it is removed to the grave.

19.

إذا بليت بالشحاحه دق الابواب الكبار

*If mendicity should unfortunately be thy lot, knock at the large gates only.*

Ask assistance from those only who have the power of helping thee.

20.

إذا كان البصل يهلل له فالسكر ايش نقول له

*If an onion causes his loud rejoicings, what then shall we say to sugar?*

Said of people who bestow admiration upon trifling objects.

21.

إذا سموك حصاد شرشر منجلك

*If they call thee reaper, whet thy scythe.*

Endeavour, even by mere appearances, to convince people that thou deservest the reputation that thou enjoyest.

## ARABIC PROVERBS.

7

22.

إذا حضر الماء بطل التيمم

*If water is present for ablution, the use of sand is discontinued.*

Affluence renders unnecessary what is practised during poverty. التيمم is the ablution with sand which the Turkish law prescribes when water cannot be procured.

23.

إذا حضرت الملائكة غابت الشياطين

*When the angels present themselves, the devils abscond.*

24.

إذا هب الهوي دخل دخل الشقوق

*If the wind blows, it enters at every crevice.*

A lucky person is fortunate in the most trifling affair. شقوق plural of شق, a fissure in the wall.

25.

إذا كان في إيدك دهن امسحه في اقرب الناس اليك

*If there be grease on thy hand, rub it off at thy nearest friend's.*

Let your own kindred, and not strangers, share in your superfluities, or the fragments from your table. ايد is used at Cairo for يد—and pronounced there eed, not yed, as it ought to be.

26.

إذا رأيته يسبه أعلم انه يحبه

*If thou seest him reproaching and swearing at him, know that he loves him.*

De amatoribus dicitur. يسب is commonly used at Cairo for reviling, calling opprobrious names, or swearing at a person.

## 27.\*

إذا جا الماء طوفان اجعل ابنك تحت رجلك

*If the water come like a deluge, place thy son under thy feet.*

Save thyself, even at the expense of thy nearest kindred or friends—a selfish principle very general in the Levant. According to Moslim tradition, when the deluge came and the rebel sons of Noah felt the water approach their ankles, they took their little children in their arms; when the water rose higher, they placed them upon their shoulders, then upon their heads; but at last, when the flood reached to their own mouths, they put the children under their feet, endeavouring to keep their own heads above the water.

## 28.\*

الاص العيار ما يسرق من حارته شيء

*The thief who understands his business does not steal from his own quarter (of the town.)*

العيار, able, clever, expert.

## 29.

آخر الليل تسمع العياط

*At the close of the night the cries are heard.*

This saying is addressed to persons exulting in good fortune, to warn them of the final issue. The night may have passed tranquilly, but at the end affrays often happen, occasioned either by drunkards, profligates coming from the houses of public women, or by robbers, who generally commit depredations at that time, when they suppose the inhabitants to be asleep.



## ARABIC PROVERBS.

9

30.

آخر الطب الكيِّ

*The ultimate remedy is a cauterly.*

If nothing else will avail, violent measures must be at last adopted.

31.

العُرسُ عُرسُ ابونا و الناس يضاربونا

*The nuptials are the nuptials of our father, yet the people fight with us!*

Those who have the strongest claim find themselves dispossessed of the advantage by others. This saying alludes to a crowd of fellows who have assembled at a nuptial entertainment, but beat and displace the bridegroom's children, to make room for themselves.

32.

الحملة الشتهتد و المرضعة اكلته

*The pregnant woman longed for it, but the nurse ate it.*

This proverb resembles in sense that immediately preceding. The whims of pregnant women are treated with indulgence in the East as well as in Europe.

33.

الطَّان ياخذ كف بكف و ربنا ياخذ بغل ببغل

*The miller takes (steals) handful by handful, but the Lord takes (sums up his reckoning) mule (load) by mule (load).*

ياخذ in Egypt used for ياخذ—the z being generally pronounced as د.

34.

المجامة بالفاس و لا الحاجة لناس

*Rather be scarified with an axe than require favours from others.*

المجامة for الاحتياج. It might likewise mean a thing, or شي (as hereafter

c

remarked,) and so understood would signify, “better to be scarified with an axe than to owe or be indebted to others for anything.” *المجامة* means *cupping*, also to make mere scarifications on the forehead or legs—a common practice in the Levant. Among the Bedouins, a father threatening his son, says, *اذا فعلته نحاجمك* “if you do so we shall cup (or scarify) you.”

## 35.

الرئيس يحبك امسح يدك في القلع

*The captain (of the ship) loves thee, wipe thy hand on the sail.*

He who is favoured by government may do any thing with impunity.

## 36.

انا احب حماتي و احب عند انفي نفسي

*(Yes)—I like my mother-in-law, and I like also that she should make a (disgusting) smell under my nose—(crepitem reddendo).*

This refers to a silly, obstinate fellow, who persists in longing for what offends others. In the East it is generally supposed that a mother-in-law cannot long be on good terms with the son-in-law, and her name is commonly used as a term expressing “disagreeable kindred.” Here is to be understood *واحب انها عند*

## 37.\*

الع ب مع العبد يوريك شقه

*Play with a slave, he will show to thee his hinder parts.*

Low people become insolent if you admit them to familiarity. *خرق الطيز* is equivalent to *طيز*—or rather to *خرق الطيز*