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ART. XVI.—*Proverbia Communia Syriaca*. By Captain R.  
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“The genius, spirit, and wit of a nation are discovered in its proverbs.”—BACON.

A writer remarks, “If men at the lowest as well as the highest stage of civilization enunciate the same truths, the fact goes to prove that these truths are unimportant.” I can hardly assent to the conclusion, even were the premiss correct, whereas it is not. Those familiar with proverbial literature have remarked that some aphorisms are common in matter, and a few even in actual manner and form, to almost all nations and languages. The Syrian, for instance, will say, “The egg of to-day, not the hen of to-morrow;” and “A live dog is better than a dead lion.” On the other hand, the points of difference are far more important. Setting aside the sayings which “bear the stamp of their birth-places, and which wear the colouring and the imagery of their native climes,” we find that there are proverbs peculiar to every race—proper to it, as are its syntax and its idiom; that each people speaks out the truth or the half truth which is in it, and, consequently, that for the most part neither the idea nor the wording bear comparison. Moreover, were it a fact that all enunciate the same truth, it by no means proves the latter to be unimportant, except to the few. The student of the nineteenth century will not, for higher thought, consult proverbs or proverbial philosophy, or other saws and instances; but he will treat not a few of them as chapters of anthropological and ethnological history; showing how truth arose in the silent education of the world; how the experience of every-day life gradually took shape and status; how the appreciation of experience became concrete in the pithy

aphorism, till at last the “wisdom of many” gained life by the “wit of one.” In it he sees the process of a pencil of light stealing into the child-like savage brain, slowly but surely dispersing the fatal glooms of ignorance and prejudice, of falsehood and barbarism; assuming various degrees of illumination, and at last becoming the perfect day of wisdom and judgment, of truth and civilization. No wonder, as Count Lucann observes, that proverbs have ever been so popular with the human race.

As regards these *Proverbia Communia*. The labours of Pocock, Erpenius, Freytag,<sup>1</sup> and others, have introduced to Europe the repertories of classical *Amsál* (امثال), in which the Arabs delighted from the days of the Khalifah Ali to those of El Maydani. My object is not so high. Returning to Western Asia, and resuming the studies which had been interrupted by long service in Africa and South America, I at once recommenced them at the commencement—the allo-qualisms of a people new to me. Presently I remembered Burckhardt's *Amsal el Masr* (Arabic and English, 1830), which aimed at illustrating manners and customs from proverbial sayings current at Cairo, and it appeared to me that the same might be done for Syria.

The modern dialect of Syria retains distinct traces of the old Aramæan, and, as may be expected in a land where men live much at home, every great city—Damascus, for instance—preserves peculiar words and phrases. And without living interpretation it is impossible to master sayings of purely local use and unfamiliar allusion, further mystified by proverbial sententiousness and conciseness. They must, however, be learnt, and even committed to memory, before a stranger can feel himself at home with the people. Here proverbs have not passed from the learned to the vulgar tongues; they are in universal circulation, amongst all degrees, from the ignorant to the man of highest cultivation; and the apposite use of aphorisms is, like wit and eloquence, a manner of power. Some of the sayings are mostly confined to women, and the

<sup>1</sup> His “*Amsal el Arab*,” in four vols. octavo, is an excerpt from the vast collection of El Maydani.

nursery; not a few of them have some popular tale whose point they resume. Many are quoted only in part, the rest being suppressed for some obvious reason. So we, for instance, might say "*facit per alium.*" As will be seen, the peculiar vagueness inherent in Arabic speech allows them an immense range of application, and permits them to be used in a variety of senses, which require from us a certain amount of study. Nor is the labour of studying them for their own sake in vain. It is highly interesting to observe the modern succedaneum for the old aphoristic philosophy of Syria, which in some form or other has overspread the civilized world.

Of all the races known to me, the Syrians and certain West African tribes are those who delight most in proverbs. The Spanish type, immortalized in Sancho Pança comes next; the Portuguese loses much of the characteristic; and the Brazilian, his descendant, has wholly lost it. When visiting Goruba I was so much struck by the speeches and harangues—mere conglomerates of quotations—that I persuaded Messrs. Tinsley to publish, in 1865, a collection of 2859 proverbs, popular amongst seven Negroid and Negro nations. The volume, which bore the title of "Wit and Wisdom from West Africa," was not so successful as the *Adagia* of Erasmus, and of course brought out the remark that the "sparkles of wit were few and faint, and the wisdom of the mildest order." This was to be expected. But my object was to make the people describe themselves, to put them, as it were, in the witness-box upon their racial trial. *Pace* the critics who differed from me, I cannot but think that the idea of the compilation was good. At any rate, it obtained the approval of one whose opinion in such a matter is worth a thousand cavils of men, who, ignorant of the subject, must borrow from the book itself the arms with which they would assail it. I need hardly mention the name of Mr. William Stirling, now Sir William Stirling Maxwell, of Keir.

This little repertory of proverbs, which I hope soon to supplement with others, was supplied to me by Mr. Hanna Mish, honorary dragoman of H.B.M.'s Consulate, Damascus.

1. الذى زوجها معها بتدبير القمر باصبعها

"She who hath her husband with her, shall turn the moon with her finger."

2. جيبوا بنات ولا تقعدوا بطالات

"Bring girls, and sit not to no purpose."—It is better (for a woman) to bear girls (if she cannot have boys), and not to remain childless.

3. بنيت على بنيت ولا حائل سنيت

"Girl upon girl, and not retaining (barren) for a year."—Meaning the same as No. 2.

4. ستى من غير وحام مريضه

"My lady without (the) queasiness (of pregnancy) is unwell."—Said of a woman who affects to be an invalid; to be delicate, to be interesting.

5. الحب والحبل والركوب على جمل لا يخنفوا

"Love and pregnancy, and riding upon a camel, cannot be hid."—Similar to the Persian "Musk and murder cannot be concealed."

6. كل شى تشتغل السمرة لا يكفيها خطوط و حمرة

"However much the brown woman works, it will not pay for her eye-paint and rouge."—Applied to men and women who spend more than they make. So the Turkish proverb, *Fantasia chok, parah yok.*

7. دور الدورة ولو دارت وخذ بنت البيت ولو بارت

"Go the round way, though (it be) long, and marry the daughter of a house (*i.e.* good family), though she be stale (or has lain fallow, from *بور*)"

8. تتكتى القرعه بشعر بنت خالتها

"The scald-headed woman prides herself on the hair of her (maternal) aunt's daughter."—Said about a small or a bad man who boasts the greatness or the goodness of his relatives.

## 9. الحمار يتكنى بان الحصان خاله

"The ass prides himself upon the horse being his (maternal) uncle."—Meaning the same as No. 8.

## 10. مثل اليهود على اخف الصنایع

"Like the Jew who (ever) chooses the meanest work."—Said of one who neglects important for trivial matters.

## 11. مثل فقرا اليهود لا دنيا ولا اخره

"Like Jew beggars, who enjoy neither this world nor the next."—Said of a man who fails in life. So they also say *Misl el Fawákhireh* (plur. of *Fakhúri*, a jar-maker) *wa la dunyá wa la ákhireh*. The jar-maker is proverbially a rascal, and his calling is a poor one. The first three words are generally found sufficient; and to make it more offensive to the Jews, Moslems say, *Misl el yahúd*.

## 12. تغشفي يا خاله كل دعاوى بطاله

"Be wroth, O aunt! (here means a stepmother) for all thy curses are in vain."—Said to any one who curses or uses bad language. *Fishfish* فشفش means literally "vapid wine."

## 13. ألف دعوى ما شقت قميص

"A thousand curses never tore a shirt."—So our adage, "Hard words break no bones."

## 14. لا الفارة طاهرة ولا دعاها مستجاب

"The mouse is not pure, nor is her prayer answered (by heaven)."—Said to a bad man who curses.

## 15. طب الجرة على فمها تطلع البنت مثل امها

"Turn the jar mouth downwards: the daughter will turn out like the mother."—The first half is merely for the purpose of rhyme. *Li ummihá* is also said, instead of *Misl ummihá*.

## 16. يا بنت من علاكى عزك وبيت حماكى

"Girl, who raised thee (so high)? Thine honour (*i.e.* husband) and the house of thy mother-in-law." (*Bayt Hamá*, the husband's family; Hamu, حمو father-in-law; and Hamá, حما mother-in-law.)

## 17. رقعته شنعته ولا لحم بصال

"(Let a man wear) foul rags, but not show (a naked) skin."—Said, for instance, to woman. Meaning that though poor she may be honest.

## 18. يا بنت لا تفرحى بشوب عرسك يا ما وراه من الشقا

"Girl! don't exult in thy wedding dress. Ah! how much trouble is behind it."—Said to a man enjoying himself without thought of the future.

## 19. لا تروح بين القبور ولا تشم رائحة المنتنه

"Go not amongst the tombs; nor smell evil odours."—Said to one, for instance, who wishes to meddle in troubles which do not concern him.

## 20. لا تقول للمغنى غنى ولا للمصلى صلى

"Say not to the singer, sing, nor to those praying, pray."—Meaning, it is useless to ask a man to do what he is compelled to do; he will only make excuses, and perhaps refuse.

## 21. بدل ان تقول للدجاجة كش اضربها واكسر رجلها

"Instead of saying to the hen Kish (pst! be off), strike her and break her leg."—Spoken by one asking a favour from another; and when the latter, who can grant it, makes excuses and puts him off.

## 22. رافق الديك وشوف وين يوديكت

"Befriend the cock, and see where he bears you." Evil communications corrupt good manners. (*Shúf* for *sháf*: others say يوم the owl.)

## 23. كل عنزة معلقة بكرعوبها

"Every goat is stuck to her circle."—Said after giving good advice to a man who will not take it.

## 24. كل الدروب توصل للطاحون

(Or, *Kull ud durúb ala 't 'Tahun*.) "All the roads lead to the mill."—Spoken to a man who tries roundabout ways, when he can go straight to the point.

## 25. ما فى طلعه حتى قبالها نزله

"There is no rising up without a falling down in front of it."—Meaning, that any man will have his turn of good and bad fortune.

## 26. ما يجي الشرباق من العراق حتى يكون ملسوع الهوام فارق

"The tiryak (Mithridate) will not come from Irak (where it is made) till the man bitten by the snakes is released (by death)."—Said by a man whose important business is deferred. Others say, *Malsu' el hawa', i.e.* the victim of love.

## 27. على قد بساطك مد رجلكت

"According to the size of your carpet stretch your legs."—The same as our "Cut your coat according to your cloth."

## 28. لسانه مثل مقص السكاف لا يقص الا النجاسة

"Like a cobbler's scissors, which cut nothing but the impure (leather)."—Spoken of a foul-mouthed man. Often the first half of this proverb is found enough.

## 29. كل الكلاب احسن من حيمور

"Every dog is better than Haymúr (proper name of dog, generally pronounced Hammúr)."—The speaker is supposed to declare his dog worse than all others. Said by a man who complains of his wife, children, friends, and so forth.

## 30. مثل الكلاب شبعه او جوعه

"Like dogs, full or empty (it is all the same)."—Benevolently said of a poor man, or of one who wants everything.

## 31. النذر للدير والوخم على سمعان

"Gifts to the convent and filth (polite people prefer *El bahvá*, toil and trouble) for Samaán (proper name of the convent servant)."—Said of a servant or a slave working for his master.

## 32. كل الديوك تصبح والصيت الى ابو قونبرة

"All the cocks crow, but honour is given to the crested cock (*Abu kumburah*, a bird with feathered tuft, and there-

fore more remarkable)."—Spoken of a man who carries off honours or profit from those more deserving.

## 33. كل شى عند العرب صابون

"Everything is soap to the Arab."—Meaning, all is fish that comes to his net.

## 34. حقا ابن متا الذى عاش الف ومائة سنة وما تهتا

"Hanná, son of Manná, who lived a thousand one hundred years, and never enjoyed himself."—Said to one complaining of a little misery. The Spanish *Ommiad Khalifet el Nasr*, "the heir of prosperity," was more easily contented; he owned to the happy days in a reign of fifty years and seven months.

## 35. اذا امحلت حوران تساعد هجانه

"When the Hauran (plain) fails, Hijaneh (the swampy region east of Damascus) supplies (provision)."—Popularly said in praise of Hijaneh.

## 36. الطيز طيزى والارض للسلطان

"My rump is my rump, and the land is the Sultán's."—Spoken by a man, for instance, when another would turn him out of his place or property.

## 37. شراية خرج لا بتعدّل ولا يتميل

"The tassel of a saddle-bag, which cannot straighten nor incline (the saddle)."—Applied to a ne'er-do-weel, a useless fellow, a man of no consequence.

## 38. رغيف برغيف ولا يبات جارك جيعان

"A loaf for a loaf (*i.e.* lend him a loaf), and let not thy neighbour remain hungry (for he will return thy loan)."—Meaning, assist thy brother man, and he will assist thee.

## 39. خميركم اكبر من خميرنا عيروننا برغيف

"If your bread be greater than our bread, shame us with a loaf!"—Said to one from whom a favour is wanted, and who boasts that he can do it.

## 40. جارك القريب ولا اخوك البعيد

“Your neighbour who is near, and not your brother who is far.”—Meaning, your neighbour who does you good is better than a brother who does not. Also, a live dog is better than a dead lion.

## 41. العين ما ترتفع فوق الحاجب

“The eye cannot rise above the eyebrow.”—Said by an inferior to a superior, who would do him more honour than he deserves.

## 42. العين ما تقاوم منخرز

“The eye does not oppose a collyrium needle.”—Meaning, you are too cunning of fence for me to fight you.

## 43. البومه لو كان فيها خير ما فاتها الصياد

“If there were any good in the owl, the hunter would not pass her by (but would have shot her).” Spoken thus, a man would buy an article; he hears that it has been seen and not bought by another whose judgment he values, and then he applies the proverb. Also, it means that the valuelessness of a person or thing is his or its safety.

## 44. بمصريته كرفس ما بهينكت يانفس

“One para (*misriyeh*) worth of watercress (is enough), and I won't dishonour you, O myself!”—Better be contented with humble fare (etc.) than support an obligation.

## 45. شهر الذي ما منه فايده لا تعد ايامه

“Of the month which does not profit you, count not the days.”—Meaning, take no useless trouble about what will not do you good.

## 46. يا ويل الذي ما له اضافرويا ويل الذي ما له ظهر

“Woe to him who has no nails, and woe to him who has no (one to) back (him).”—The man who has no nails cannot enjoy King James's greatest pleasure, and the friendless man cannot prosper.

## 47. كل ديك على مزبلته صياح

“Every cock crows loudly on his own dunghill.”

## 48. الحجر بمحل قنطار

“The stone in its place is a *kantár* (hundredweight).”—The same as No 47. Also they say, *Hasweh saghireh tasnud khábiyeh kantáriyeh*. “The little pebble supports (upright) the jar that holds a *kantár* (hundredweight).”

## 49. الذي يخفف راسه يتعب رجله

“He whose head is light soon tires his feet.”—Meaning, that the foot is always running about; or said of a man who does a thing without reflection, his bolt is soon shot.

## 50. الحكى من فضه و السكوت من ذهب

“Speech is of silver, silence is of gold.”—An old proverb in Syria; a comparatively new saying amongst us.

## 51. فرس الاصيلة لا يعيها جلالها

“A thorough-bred mare is not disgraced by her (bad) saddle.” They also say *iddat-há*, “her packsaddle.” The *Jilál* is the flat pad, the *Sarj* is after the Frankish fashion.—Spoken, for instance, of a rich man in a bad hat.

## 52. مصفايه ما بيعيقها ثقب

“The cullender is not hindered by a hole (more or less).”—Applied, for instance, to a man who habitually lies.

## 53. كل شى على بابه يشابه اصحابه

“Every thing in its place resembles its race.”—There is a similar saying, *Kullu andá yunzhah* (بنضح) *má fih*. “Every pot pours out its (own contents).” Good trees bear good fruits.

## 54. قال التاجر لابنه شوف الذبون واعطى على شكله

“Quoth the merchant to his son, look at the habitual buyer (the pratique), and deal to him accordingly.”—Meaning, treat every man as he deserves.

55. وقعت الفأرة من القف قالت لها السقطه الله  
جويتها انت ابعدى عنى وانا بالف خير من الله

“The mouse fell from the ceiling, and the cat cried ‘Allah.’ The mouse replied (generally *kālat ūha el fārah*), ‘go far from me, and I am with a thousand blessings from Allah.’” Allah, is ejaculated when a man stumbles or falls. Said to a man who is getting into the hands of those who will harm him.

56. وقعت البقره وكثرت السلاحين

“When the cow falls, the knackers flock (to her).”—Meaning, when a man gets into trouble his enemies collect to injure him.

57. مستهزى الرجال برأس لفت يُقتل

“He who despises men will be killed (for the sake of) a turnip.”—Meaning that if a man oppose one stronger than himself he will be lost by the least *faux pas*.

58. لو ما جراده ما وقع عصفر

“Had there not been a locust, the bird would not have fallen.”—This alludes to a long story about a bird following a locust into a house, and being trapped. The king was anxious to take a young woman called Jeradeh (the locust) from her old husband named Usfur (the bird); and the latter managed to escape by using the proverb. It is applied to a person who ventures too much. Also it means, “If I had not bribed him, I should not have won my cause.”

59. يا ما اكثر اصحابى عند ما كان كرمى دبس ويا ما اقل اصحابى  
عند ما صار كرمى يبس

“Oh! how many were my friends when my vines produced syrup; and oh! how few were my friends when that same vine dried up.”—Familiar to all, *Donec eris feli multos numerabis amicos*.

60. مثل الدجاج دايمًا يهدس بالغرابله

“Like the fowls which always think of the broken (or spoilt, corn, poultry food).”—Said to a man always talking shop, about money, or women, for instance.

61. ما دامك على هل حصيره لا هي طويله ولا هي قصيره

“As long as you lie on this mat, it will become neither longer nor shorter.”—Meaning, whilst you are so lazy and inactive, you will do no good, you will not prosper.

62. ايش المر لئدى امر منه

“What is the bitter to one (who has tasted) the more bitter?”—Said when misfortunes or sorrows come one after the other.

63. لا عين تقشع ولا قلب يوجع

“Let not the eye discover what pains the heart.”—Meaning, wink at small annoyances. Also, the heart does not grieve at what the eye does not see.

64. مثل الدجاجة ما تملك على بيضها

“Like the hen who is not mistress of her own eggs.”—Said to a man of property who is not master in his own house.

65. كل قمحه مسوسه لها كيال اعما

“Every worm-eaten (corn-)grain has a blind (others say one-eyed) measurer.”—Reproving a servant, for instance, who buys a bad article. Also, *Toute fadette a son fadet*.

66. الكذب ملح الرجال وعيب على من يصدق

“Lying is the salt (goodness) of men, and shameful (only) to one who believes.”—Said to a great liar, whose lies are, like salt, required for all kinds of food. It is also used in a literal sense, even as Bacon declared that the mixture of a lie doth ever add pleasure—only a little less usually than the Syrian adage. The first half is often said without the second, and then it becomes a curious index of material thought.

67. لا تلوم الغايب حتى يحضر

“Blame not the absent (who is doing your work) till he shall appear.”—Similar to our *De mortuis*, etc. *Les absents ont toujours tort*.



## 68. مثل المرابعين يفرح بفتح العدال

"Like the *Murábain* (hired labourers) who rejoice at the opening of the grain-bags (which benefit the master)."—Spoken to or about a man who works for another's advantage.

## 69. الحق الكذاب ليا بدار

"Follow the liar to the house-door (*i.e.* to the end of his lies)."—Said of a "promising" man, push him as far as possible.

## 70. الذي يلعب القط يحتمل خراميشه

"He who plays with the cat must suffer her claws."—Addressed to one, for instance, who is insulted after speaking to a rude fellow, who has touched pitch, and has been defiled.

## 71. من كثرة بناته صار الكلب صهرة

"From the number of his daughters, even the dog (in the streets) has become his son-in-law."—The man with many (plain) daughters must make presents to every one in order to get them off his hands.

## 72. مثل حمار الزبال يمشى عايق ومحمّل وخم

"Like the dustman's donkey, who paces swaggering, and yet carries only dirt."—Spoken of or to a pretentious fellow. Also they call him *Himar Muhammad Asfâr*, "ass laden with books."

## 73. من يعتاز الكلب يقوله صباح الخير يا خالي

"He who wants the dog says to him, 'Good morning, O my uncle,' (or, *Sabahak el khayr haji kalb*, 'Good morning, Mister Dog).'"—So the people of Trinidad wittily say,

*Dêir chein, cé chein;*

*Devant chein*

*Cé*, "Missier Chein."

## 74. اليد الذي ما تقدر تعضها بوسها وأدعى عليها بالكسر

"The hand which you cannot bite, kiss it, and pray that it may be broken."—Same meaning as 73. They also say, "He kisses the hands and he laughs at the beards."

## 75. جهنم وبين البوايج

"Hell and amongst the slippers?"—Meaning, for instance, that when you condescend to visit your enemy you expect to be civilly treated, and yet you are not—adding insult to injury. Also, don't let people say that I am in hell and also disgraced; I am lost in both worlds.

## 76. ما بقى احدا حتى قُرض حتى دبان الفرس

"Every one has stung him, even the horse-fly."—Said about a man who suffers from every one.

## 77. ثلم الاعوج من ثور الكبير

"The crooked furrow is (the work) of the big bull."—Meaning that the fault is from the great man. A saying often used about the rulers, who, of course, should set the best example.

## 78. ما عمرة مقسم دخل الجنده

"Never in all his life shall the divider (arbitrator) go to heaven."—Because the arbitrator in these lands is always a rascal; he gets the best portion—the oyster, not the shells.

## 79. فراق البدو بعيا ولا بسوق العبي كله

"Get rid of the *Badawi* (wild man) with a cloak, and not with the whole cloak-market."—Meaning, sacrifice a little to save much.

## 80. انكر الذئب وهي القصيب

"Speak of the wolf, and make ready the club."—So our adage, "Talk of the Devil," etc.

## 81. ابن الحلال عند ذكره يبان

"The honest man appears when he is spoken of."—Said as No. 80. Also about a man who does good.

## 82. لا تستكثر اولادك على عزرائل ولا مالك على الظالم

"Do not boast of thy many children before Izrail (the angel of death), or of thy wealth before the tyrants."—The first half of this phrase is the more used.

## 83. لا تقول فول حتى يصير بالمكيول

“Do not say ‘beans’ before they are in the measure.”—So our proverb about counting chickens; the vision of Mirza, etc.

## 84. حساب الحقله ما بيحي على حساب البيدر

“The estimate of the field (whose crop is still in grass) does not agree with the estimate of the thrashing-floor.”—Same signification as 83.

## 85. يا حواجبه يا عينيه على المغتسل بائن

“O his (fine) eyebrows! O his (fine) eyes! they show upon the *mughtasal* (place where the Moslem dead are washed).”—This is especially a woman’s proverb, meaning, it is useless to praise a thing which is before your eyes. They generally say, *Ya hawajibhu, ya uyunhu*, etc.

## 86. شد الخيط ومطه الذي عليه شى يحطه

“Tighten the thread and draw it close; whoso has a share let him put it down (contribute it).”—Said, for instance, to a shareholder, one of a picnic, etc., who grumbles.

## 87. عشرة حلكيه تحنك وشرب مويه

“A friendly party of Aleppines laugh, jaw, and drink water.”—Our “tea and turn out.” *Tahannak* from *hanak*, a jaw; in low language, as we say, to jaw, to chaff.

## 88. ديك الفحيح من البيضه يصيح

“The clever cock crows from the egg.”—Alluding to a sharp boy: also meaning that the boy is the father of the man.

## 89. كل الجمال بتعارك ما عدا جملنا بارك

“All the camels are fighting together, except our camel, which is kneeling.”—Said by a man to himself when others are working round him, and he does nothing. *Jamal-kum* is used if applied to another. It also means all are employed except myself.

## 90. مثل الحمام حنيه بلا رضاعه

“Like the pigeon, fond (of her young) without suckling (them).”—Spoken of a man who is civil, but who will not spend his money.

## 91. انظريا حمار حتى يطلع الربيع

“Wait (for grass), O donkey, until spring comes.”—Said to a man who works without getting his wage. *Unzur* is for *intazir*.

## 92. هل اقرع عمرى ما جمرت

“This scald-head all my life I never cured (cleaned).”—The *akra* is always supposed to be a quarrelsome man. The saying would mean, I never met with such a tiger; I never interfere in this matter, and so forth. *Tajmir* is especially applied to burnishing gold and silver.

## 93. مثل شحمه قرد ما بيسلى ولا بيذوب

“Like the monkey’s fat, which does not soften (*bi-yashli*) and does not melt (*bi-yadub*).”—Said of an impracticable or avaricious man. *salu* means becoming semi-liquified.

## 94. احترت فيك يا اقرع كيف اداويك

“I marvel at thee, O scald-head! how I shall cure thee?”—Said when a man will not consent to anything. Like No. 93.

## 95. الكحل احسن من العما

“Kohl (collyrium) is better than blindness.”—Meaning, better to have a little than to lose all; because the use of kohl for a month may save the eye. The better form is *el ramad*, (ophthalmia) is better, etc.

## 96. كل ما شفقت اعمى طيه ما انت اخير من ربه

“When thou seest the blind man beat him down; (for) thou art not greater than his God.”—Punish the bad man, because he cannot do good. The Creator made the blind man blind. Also said of an ungrateful man. They tell a tale of the Prophet Jonas, who prayed the Lord to heal a blind boy, whereupon the latter began to stone him; the prophet quoted the proverb as above.

## 97. كنيسة القريه ما بتشفى

"The church which is near does not cure."—Said of a man, for instance, who buys (or consults a doctor, etc.) from afar, when he can buy as well near. Also of near relations, one's cousins, for instance. Opposed to the Scotch idea of blood being thicker than water.

## 98. حس الطبل يودى الى بعيد

"The noise of the kettledrum goes far."—Report flies abroad: the end often omitted is *wa juwwáthu fārigh*, "and she is empty inside." That would be said of a windy boaster, etc.

## 99. صوت الطبل غطّا النايات

"The sound of the (big) drum drowns the flute."—Said of a great man when a greater appears. Also in the form *Ajá* (has come) *el Tabl*, etc.

## 100. جمل مطرح الجمل يبرك

"The camel kneels on the place of the camel."—Spoken, for example, when dismissing a servant; another can soon be found. "There are as good fishes in the sea," etc.

## 101. كنت اصلى حتى يحصلى لّما حصلى بطلت اصلى

"I used to pray till I obtained (what I prayed for); but when I obtained it, I left off praying."—Meaning, for instance, women fawn and flatter till they get what they want.

## 102. المعروف مع غير اهله ضايح

"Kindness is wasted on the undeserving (the ungrateful)."

## 103. خذ الاصيل ولو انه على الحصير

"Take the noble, though (sleeping) upon a mat."—Meaning, in marriage (or in hiring servants, and so forth) prefer blood to money.

## 104. الجمل لو شاف حردبته لوقع فك رقبتة

"If the camel had seen his hunchback he would have fallen and broken his neck."—Corresponds with Burns' lines about the "Giftie."

## 105. قالوا للعميان غلى الزيت قالوا هذا هم لا يعيننا

"They said to the blind (men), 'Oil is dear!' They replied, 'This is a sorrow which does not touch us!'"—The blind not wanting lamps. The saying is applied to those who spread reports that do not concern the hearer.

## 106. من جرب المجرّب كان عقله مخرب

"Whoso tries the tried his intellect is belied."—Meaning that he is a fool.

## 107. حط قردك على قرده

"Put thy monkey upon his monkey."—Meaning, if a man will not hear you, din it always into his ears; or try who is the better man. A favourite proverb with the Jews.

## 108. لا تدعى لصاحبك بالسعادة تقدمه

"Pray not for the prosperity of thy friend, lest thou destroy him."—Meaning, that when prosperous he will forget you. Said to a friend who has waxed rich.

## 109. اذا انعاق رسالك استبشر فيه

"If thy messenger delay, hold it (a sign of) good news."—As we say, "No news good news."

## 110. لا تكثر الزيارة على الملوك اذا كانوا اهلك يكرهوك

"Visit not often the kings (*i.e.* the great), for even if related to you they will hate you."—Said to a tuft-hunter; also an excuse popularly made to one who reproaches you with not visiting him often enough.

## 111. كن بعيد وانتظر الذى تريد

"Remain afar and await what you want."—Equivalent to "Await the opportunity." Almost same signification as 110.

## 112. كثر الشد يرخي

"Too much tying loosens."—Meaning that man loses by pushing too fast.

113. ان كان ماشى على هل درب خيط بغير مسله

"If he (the muleteer, etc.) be walking upon this road, let him sew with another pack-needle."—Said, for instance, of one who asks an impossible favour, deeming it easy, "Let him take some other thought;" this pack-needle can do no good.

114. البير الفارغ لا يملأ النداء

"Dew fills not upon an empty well."—Said to a person who lives beyond his income.

115. هذه المصفاة لا يملأ ظروف

"This filter will not fill the (water-) skins."—Same as 114.

116. من يدق الباب يسمع الجواب

"Whoso knocks at the door hears the reply."—Similar to our "Knock, and it shall be opened to you."

117. لا ظرف انخزق ولا زيت اندلت

"No skin has burst, and no oil has been lost (*lit.* poured out)."—Used when a man wishes, for instance, to decline a contract.

118. اذا دقيت على باب و ما فتحو لك فتش على عرضك ورح

"If thou knock at a door which is not opened to thee, consult thine honour and go."—Said when a favour is asked of one who makes excuses.

119. لا فاطمه بالعلم ولا حسن بالكتاب

"Is not Fatimah (my daughter) at her task? Is not Hasan (my son) at his school?"—Meaning "What matter to me?" *Kuttáb* in low language means a school.

120. لا من الذين آمنوا ولا من الذين كفروا

"He is not of those who believe, or of those who disbelieve."—Said of a man who does not care for anything. (Quoted from the Koran.)

121. مثل حمار المطران عاقل شيطان

"Like the archbishop's ass, a clever devil."—Applied to a slippery fellow. They also say, *Misl himar el khákhán*, "Like the ass of the Rabbi."

122. اذا ضربت اوجع واذا اطعمت اشبع

"When you hit, hurt (*i.e.*, let him feel it): when you feed, fill."—Our *Age quod agis*.

123. يا شى يصلح يا تركه اصلح

"Either the thing is good, or to leave it (undone) is good."—Same signification as 122.

124. أسرق على عدوك جميعان ولا تمر عليه عريان

"Pass by thy foe hungry; but pass him not naked (so that he can see you)."—Meaning that if you ask a favour of an enemy, do not let him see that you want it.

125. العما ولا هذه الدوله

"Blindness, and not (rather than) this government."—Said when an enemy gets into power. They tell a tale that the bear, the fox, and the monkey were in conversation, and the former expressed a desire to be *Wali* (Governor-General) of Syria. "What will you do for me?" said the fox. "I will make you my *Kihaya* (secretary)," was the reply. "Strike me blind," cried the monkey, "before I see such a government!"

126. نحس تعرفه ولا سعد تتعرف به

"An unlucky man whom thou knowest, and not (rather than) a lucky man whom thou dost not know."—Meaning, if you dismiss a servant, or drop a friend, you will probably take one worse. For *Sa'ad* some say *Jayyid* (noble). They also say, *A'l Usman marhúmin bi yeji wahid anhas min el sani*, "The sons of Usman (the Ottomans) are pitied, (because) he who comes is worse than the other (preceding him)."

127. من غير دف بيرقص

"Without the timbrel he dances."—Said of an excitable, passionate, fidgety man.

128. قالوا للعمى ايش بتريد قال جوز عيون

They said to the blind man, "What dost thou desire?" He replied, "A pair of eyes!"—Said when you offer a thing which you know is wanted.

129. الذى ما هو من ظهرتك كلما جن افرحله

"He who is not of thy loins, however mad he be, be glad."—Because his madness does not concern you. A rascal proverb, and great contrast to the *Homo sum*, etc.

130. حبيبى مليح واجاه هبة ربح

"My lover is handsome, and a breath of wind came to him (and made him love me the more)."—Meaning, he was glad (or grieved), and now he is the more gladdened (or grieved). To whom much is given, more shall be given us.

131. حبيب بحبه ولو كان عبد اسود

"I love my friend, though he be a black slave."—Said when a man blames you for liking what is not worthy.

132. مثل معلم الاولاد حاضر الدفن وعايب العقل

"Like the teacher of boys, whose beard is there, but whose wits are nowhere."—Said to an absent man, one *cupo concentrate*, etc. There are the usual multitude of stories against schoolmasters. It is enough to quote part of this proverb, e.g. *Hâsir el dakan*.

133. عزيمة الحمار للعرس يا للخطب يا للمويه

"The invitation of the ass to a wedding is to (carry) wood or water."—Said, for instance, of a man who has no right to be in a distinguished assembly; of one who works without pay, etc.

134. بلادى ولو جارت على عدية واهلى ولو شحو اعلى كرامة

"(It is) my country (home), although comfort has fallen out with me: (it is) my family, although they fail to befriend me."—Used, for instance, when advising an exile to go home.

135. لو ما كان الوطن قتال كانت بلاد السوء خراب

"If (one's) birth-place were not deadly, the poor lands (of the world) would be deserts, (as no one would go abroad)."—Almost the same as No. 134.

136. الذى ما بده يجوز بنته يغلى نقدها

"He who wisheth not to marry his daughter asks much (ready) money."—*Nakd* is the same as *Mahr*, the pre-nuptial settlement made upon the *Moslemah*. Said of one, who not wishing to sell, asks a ridiculous price. In Syria, men do not refuse to part with an article to a superior, but demand something unconscionable, as £100 for a dog.

137. بيحكى من كل وادى عصا

"He talks a stick from every valley."—Said of one who talks much nonsense. A favourite proverb with the peasantry; not used in the city, but of course intelligible.

138. كما ستى كما سيدى

"Like my mistress, like my master."—Supposed to be said in the language of a black slave girl. Applied to a man who cannot get satisfaction from or content any one. It would also mean, "There is no good (to be got) from my mistress or my master." Amongst Syrian Moslems the grandchildren address their grandparents *Sidi* and *Sitti*. The Christians for *Sidi* would say *Jaddi*.

139. ما بيحك بدتك الا ضفرتك

"No nail can scratch (thy body) but thine own."—Advising a man to do his own business, and not to ask the aid of others.

140. البصه ما بتحرق الا مطرحها

"The (live) coal burns only its place."—Meaning the heart knoweth its own bitterness, etc. Said to those who administer useless pity.

141. الذى تخدمه طبعه والذى ترهنه بيعه

“Obey the man thou servest, and sell the thing thou pledgest.”—Because it is useless to keep it. The proverb means, finish off your business—*Age quod agis*.

142. بيت الذى ربانى ما بينسانى

“The house which brought me up will not give me up (forget me).”—Although you will not assist me, others will.

143. كل شى تربيه ينفعك الابنى آدم يقلعك

“Every thing (which) thou plantest will profit thee, save the son of man, who will uproot thee.”—Ingratitude is apparently the rule in Syria.

144. جبناك يا اقرع توانسنا كشفت قرعتك وخوفتنا

“We brought thee, O scald-head! to be company with us; thou didst uncover thy scald-head and frighten us.”—Said of a friend whom you summon to your aid, and yet he goes against you.

145. من تزوج من غير ملته يموت بغير علة

“Whoso marries out of his faith, he dies a living death (*lit.* he dies of a disease besides his own disease).”—The signification is evident. The proverb is also said to one who meddles with what does not concern him.

146. من آمنك لا تحونه ولو كنت خوان

“One who trusts thee, deceive not, though thou be a deceiver.”

147. ان ضاعت الامانة اعلم مخزنك عبك

“If trust be broken make thy pocket thy store.”—Spoken to a man when you lose confidence in him.

148. يقتل القتيل ويطلع فى جنازته

“He kills the killed (man) and goes to his funeral.”—Applied to a man who tricks you and pretends sympathy or friendship.

149. هلى بدّه نبح ما يقول اح

“He who wants *nah* (goodies), says not *Ah*.”—Meaning, who wants to be a rich or great man must not show funk or doubt.

In Syria, and especially in Damascus, there is a child's language, which may perhaps number a hundred words, and which has found its way into literature. Witness the following rather pathetic “Rubai” of the Shaykh Abd el Ghani el Nablusi:

طعميتك النم و نمم و نبح النبح

وسقيتك انبو والبستك حرير الدح

وتطلب التس منى ما اقدر اقل لك ببح

اليوم يا منيتى انا الببيع و غيرى الدح

“I fed thee with the *nam* (goodies) and the *nam-nam* (goody-goodies);

And I gave thee drink (*unbu*), and I clothed thee in silk the *dah* (nice);

And when thou askest a tip (*tiss*) I could not say thee *bah* (there is none);

But to-day, O my beloved! I am the bugbear (*bu'bu*), and another man is the nice (*dah*).”

In the proverb *nah* is a child's word for sweetmeats. *Ah* is the exclamation when eating something too hot, or when wanting to be led to the closet; in the latter sense *kikh* and *kukh* are used by the nurse. *Daadah* means “walking,” *du*, “falling,” *'a-'a* (قأأ), “going near something dirty.” The camel, the horse, the ass, all have their nursery names, and these are sometimes by no means easy to write.

150. خاص التجارة لا مكسب ولا خسارة

“The specialty of trade is not to gain and not to lose.”—Said to a man when disappointed of a great profit.

151. مثل الذى اسلم الظهر ومات العصر عيسى تبر منه ومحمد ما عرف فيه

“As one who Islamized at noon, and died (before prayers) in the afternoon; Jesus got rid of him, and Mohammed has not learned him.”—Between two stools you fall to the ground.

152. كلشى عند العطار الاحبنى غضب ما فيش

“Everything is (to be found) in the druggist's shop, but 'love-me-by-force' is not there.”—Applied to one who would force his friendship upon another.

153. لانشلك ولا تعقصنى

“(Give me) not thy bee, and do not sting me.”—Said to a treacherous man who pretends to be friendly or who talks “honey-mouf.”

154. الذى يموت يوصيك باولاده

“He who dies bequeaths to thee his children.”—Quoted of a person who has not done the good you expected him to do. Some end the proverb—*yamūtū min al jua*, “they (the children) die of hunger.”

155. لبس العيرة ما بيدقى

“The borrowed cloak never warms.”—Spoken by a man to whom a favour is done ungraciously.

156. شغل الذى ما بيطلع من القلب عناينه صعب

“The thing which comes not from the heart; its assistance is hard.”—Almost the same as 155.

157. دق الماء وهى ماء

“Beat the water, and (still) it is water.”—Meaning a pig-headed man who agrees to nothing.

158. الذى ما تتعب به الايادى ما بتحزن عليه القلوب

“What the hand has not toiled for, the heart does not moil for.”—We say, “Soon won, soon lost.”

159. كبير البيدر ولا شماتة الاعداء

“The greatness of the thrashing-floor, and not the exultation of thine enemies.”—Meaning, he works hard in order to disappoint those who would revel in his misfortunes.

160. المجنون ما له الا اهله

“The madman has none (to care for him) but his own (people).”—Said to a man who is friendly, and from whom you want a favour. Also meaning, “No one will have patience with your illhaps but a relative.” A similar saying is, *Mā li yahinn al 'al ud illa kishruh*, “No one sympathizes with the lute except its wood” (its shell). Applied to the wife taking the part of her husband, etc.

161. تعلم من العشق كلمة اوحشتنا

“He has learned from love (only) the word *Auhashtanā*,” “(You have made me sad by your absence,” “it is long since I saw you).”—He learns only that, and he pretends to know much. Applied to a man who would be a sage, a doctor, a merchant, etc.

162. الموتى ما له صاحب

“The departed (from this world) has no friend.”—Spoken of a man always changing his friends during life.

163. يوم الله يعين الله

“On God's day, God helps.”—Said, for instance, to a person who predicts your failure.

164. ارض الواطيه تشرب ماءها وما غيرها

“The lowland drinks its own water and the water of the other (upland).”—Meaning, he keeps friendly with all.

165. الذى ياخذ امى يصير عمى

“He who marries my mother becomes my (step-) father.”—We must be resigned to those who govern us. *Amm* is the paternal uncle, the step-father, or the father-in-law.

166. ما يكفى المية موته بل عصيته بالقبر.

“Death is not enough for the dead, he must be squeezed in his grave.”—Meaning, a man not only dies, his family must spend money on his funeral. Said also, when, for instance, a man has too much to do, and more business comes. A similar saying is *khurkah* (for *khirkah*) *fauk el khurduk*, a wad or rag upon the (charge of small) shot; and *Shankuleh fauk el himl*, a package upon the load—the last straw that breaks the camel’s back.

167. قلنا لك شويه ما قلنا لك احرقه.

“We said to thee, ‘cook it,’ not burn it.”—*Pas de zèle*.

168. انفخت الطبل وتفرقت العشاق.

“The timbrel burst and the lovers were scattered.”—Quoted when offence is taken in company and all part displeased.

169. كل جديد له بهجه وكل عتيق له دفشه.

“Everything new brings joy: everything old brings repulse.”—The new broom expels the old.

170. احفظ عتيقتك جديدك ما بيثقا لك.

“Preserve thy old; (for) thy new will not last thee.”—Opposed to the former. In Syria also these sayings are in pairs.

171. قلبه من الجامض لوى.

“His stomach from (eating) sour things is crude.”—Said when trouble (or business) comes upon trouble, etc.

172. كثير الغلبه راح لجهنم قال الحطاب اخضر.

“Much meddling went to hell (and) said, ‘The fuel is green’ (there).”—Of course it is useless to tell those there what the state of the fuel is. *Ghalabah* is mostly applied to excessive talking, e.g., *Lá takassar el ghalabah!* in Persian, *Fuzuli ma-kun*.

173. من ذكرنى بغمه كنت عنده عظيم.

“He who remembers me with his bone, honours me with his bone.”—Meaning, he shows that he remembers me. The play of words is upon *Azm* and *Azim*; *induh kalb azim* is said by the baser sort.

174. اطلب الخير لجارك تجده بدارك.

“Seek the good of thy neighbour, and thou wilt find good at home.”—Benefit yourself by benefiting others.

175. لا ينفع لالصيف ولا لالسيف ولا لغدرات الزمان.

“He is no good; neither to the guest, nor to the sword, nor to the treachery of time.”—Said of a man utterly worthless.

176. نفع ما منه دخانه بيعمى.

“There is no profit from him, and his smoke blinds.”—Spoken of one utterly worthless, and harmful withal.

177. ان كان طبأحك جعيس لا تبالى من القرف.

“If Yaís be thy cook, take no thought of thy squeamishness.”—Yaís was a notoriously unclean cook, who put too much water in his *marak* (“kitchen”—pound on rice, etc.). The saying means expect no good from a bad workman.

178. كثرة الطباخين تحرق الطعام.

“The number of cooks burn the food.”—“They spoil the broth,” as we say. A similar proverb is, *Kisrat el ruasa bey agharsik el markab*, “Too many captains sink the ship.”

179. مفتاح البطن لقمه ومفتاح الشركمه.

“The key to the belly is a bit (to eat, a mouthful), and the key to quarrel is a (hot) word.”—Used when people are to be dissuaded from quarrelling, or when persuading them to eat.

180. نارك ولا جنة غيرك.

“Your (hell) fire, and not another man’s heaven.”—Meaning, I prefer a poor gift from you to a rich one from another.



181. وعلى الكبير يساع الصغير.

“The big vase contains the small one.”—That is to say, “Be patient, you are a greater (or wealthier) man than he is.”

182. لا بد يذوب الثلج ويبان الوحم

“The snow must certainly melt and show the filth” (also خراً). Spoken of a man who makes much fuss about business of no importance.

183. مثل دجاج داريا بيمترك القمحه وبياكل الخريه

“Like the hen of Dárayá (village) that leaves the wheat and eats the filth,” which explains itself.

184. القشايه عوجه

“The cucumber is crooked.”—Meaning, you can't make the cucumber straight, or the liar a truthful man. So they say, *Zanab el kalb aawaj wa lau hattuh alf sanat li 'l kálíb*, “The dog's tail is crooked though you put it in the mould for a thousand years.” Applied to bad government, etc.

185. ما شفت ولا تشعت ولا بعرف

“I have not seen, and I have not perceived, and I don't know.”—It is said that this is the first sentence of the catechism taught to the Jewish child at Damascus.

186. كل فعل جائز وكل مطلوب حرام

“All (things) done are lawful; all (things) asked for are unlawful.”—Used when encouraging a man to act upon his own responsibility.

187. مثل خورى عين طينه

“Like the priest of Ayn Tinah.” They relate that the parishioners having complained of their tyrannical parson to the Moslem authorities, found him sitting amongst and in high favour with the latter. A kind of Vicar of Bray. Said of one from whom you cannot escape.