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sketches of
Fools and
Simpletons

Imām Ibn al-Jawzī

رحمه الله

دار السنة

al-Hāfiẓ

Abū'l-Faraj Ibn al-Jawzī [d. 597AH]

SKETCHES of FOOLS and SIMPLETONS

An abridged rendering of Imām Ibn Al-Jawzī's
'Akhhbar al-Hamqa wa'l Mughaffalīn'



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P.O. Box 9818, Birmingham, B11 4WA, United Kingdom

W: www.darassunnah.com
E: info@darassunnah.com
E: daar-us-sunnah@mail.com

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THE BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Ḥāfiẓ Abū'l-Faraj 'Abdu'l-Raḥmān ibn Jawzī

His Name and Lineage

He is Abū'l-Faraj Jāmal al-Dīn 'Abdu'l-Raḥmān ibn 'Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Alī Ibn 'Ubayd Allāh Ibn al-Jawzī al-Qurashī al-Tamimi al-Bakrī from the family of Muḥammad ibn Abū Bakr *al-Ṣiddīq*, al-Baghdādī al-Hanbalī.¹

His Birth and Upbringing

He was born in 509 or 510 A.H. Upon reaching adolescence, his aunt took him to Ibn Nāṣir from whom he learned a great deal. He came to love preaching while barely having reached the age of puberty, and from then started to give sermons to the people.

His father passed away when he was three years old so his aunt

¹ *Thail al-Raudatain*, p.21, *al-Bidāyah wa'l-Nihāyah*, p. 13/26.

took care of him. His relatives were copper merchants so at times in hadith hearings he would write his name as 'Abdu'l-Raḥmān ibn 'Alī al-Ṣaffār [i.e. The Coppersmith].

His first ḥadīth hearing was in 556 A.H., as cited by al-Dhahabī.²

While still very young he became known as a religious person who would not socialise with anyone. He would not eat from any food whose source was doubtful. He would only leave his house for prayer and he would not play with other kids. He was a person of very great determination and ambition. He spent all his life busy in seeking knowledge, preaching and authoring.³

His Teachers

Al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn al-Jawzī has already introduced his teachers in his book *Mashyakhat Ibn al-Jawzī* [i.e. the scholars who taught Ibn al-Jawzī] where he listed many of them. In the field of ḥadīth he benefitted from accompanying Ibn Nāṣir, in Qur'ān and *Adab* [i.e. Manners] from Sibṭ al-Khiyāt and Ibn al-Jawālīqī. He was the last to narrate from al-Dinawari and al-Mutawakkili.⁴

His Students

Those who narrated from him include his son and companion, the great scholar Muḥyī al-Dīn Yūsuf who was a teacher in the

² *Thail al-Raḍḍatāin*, 21, *Thail 'ala Tabaqāt al-Ḥanabila*, 1/401, *Shatharāt al-Thahab*, 4/330.

³ *al-Bidāyah wa'l-Nihāyah*, 13/29, *Said al-Khāṭir*, 238.

⁴ *Siyar al-A'lām al-Nubulā'*, 21/366, 367.

institute of al-Musta‘sim billāh, his oldest son ‘Alī al-Nāsikh, his grandson, the preacher Shams al-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Farghalī al-Hanafī the author of *Mir‘āt al-Zamān* (Mirror of Time), al-Ḥāfiẓ ‘Abd al-Ghanī, Shaykh Muwaffaq al-Dīn Ibn Qudāma, Ibn al-Dubaythī, Ibn al-Nājjar and al-Diyā.⁵

His Children

His grandson Abū al-Muẓfir and majority of those who wrote his biography say that he had three sons:

1. The oldest of them, Abū Bakr ‘Abd al-‘Azīz: He became a jurist in the school of Aḥmad and took knowledge from Abū al-Waqt, Ibn Nāṣir, al-Armawī and a group of his father’s teachers. He traveled to the city of al-Musul where he preached and held sermons there for which he earned the peoples full acceptance. It is said that the family of al-Zahrazurī used to be jealous of him so they made someone put poison in his drink which caused him to die in al-Mūsul in 554 A.H. during the lifetime of his father.⁶
2. Abū al-Qāsim Badr al-Dīn ‘Alī al-Nāsikh⁷
3. Abū Muḥammad Yūsuf Muḥyī al-Dīn⁷: He was the most

⁶ *Thail Tabaqāt al-Ḥanabila*, 1/430, 431.

^{*} Publishers note: For a detail biography of him please refer to, ‘*The Sincere Council to the Seekers of Sacred Knowledge*’, by Ibn Jawzī, published by Dār as-Sunnah, Birmingham, UK, 2011.

⁷ cf. *Siyar al-A‘lām al-Nubulā’*, 23/372, *al-Ibar*, 5/237, *Dīwal al-Islām*, 2/122, *al-Bidāyah wa’l-Nihāyah*, 13/203, *Thail Tabaqāt al-Ḥanabila*, 2/258-261, *al-‘Ujūd al-Masbūk*, 635, *Shatharāt al-Thahab*, 5/286287, Ibn Shaṭṭī: *Mukhtasar Tabaqāt al-Ḥanabila*, p.57.

⁸ *Mir‘āt al-Zamān*, 8/503, Abū Shamma: *Thail al-Rauḍatāin*, 26.

intelligent and youngest son as he was born in 580 A.H. He became involved in preaching and held sermons after his father, in which he excelled and by which he was looked up to by his confreres. He then was appointed to control and supervise markets of Baghdād, and after that he was assigned to deliver the messages of the caliphs to kings of other different regions peculiarly to the Ayyūbī family in the Shām region. He held the position of teacher in the institute of caliph al-Mustā'sim in 640 A.H. till he was killed in prison in 656 A.H. by Hulaku who occupied Baghdād and destroyed it. His three sons Jāmal al-Dīn, Sharaf al-Dīn and Tāj al-Dīn were killed with him. He has authored many works, including *Mā'adin al-Abriz fi Tafsir al-Kitāb al-'Aziz* and *al-Madhab al-Aḥmad fi Madhab Aḥmad*. Unlike his brother Abu al-Qāsim, he was a dutiful son who honored his father and treated him well.

His grandson mentioned that Ibn al-Jawzī had many daughters; Rabi'a, Sharaf al-Nisā', Zainab, Jauhara, Sitt al-'Ulama al-Sughra and Sitt al-'Ulama al-Kubrā.⁸

His Uniqueness as a Preacher

Excellent indeed are the words of al-Ḥāfiẓ al-Dhahabī about him: 'He was the leading figure in reminding the people and had no equal. He would recite pleasant poetry and eloquent prose spontaneously. His fine words and moving speech was abundant. There has never been anyone like him, not before him and not after him. He is the carrier of the flag of exhortation in its various forms. He had a pleasant appearance and a good voice and his talks had an impact on peoples' hearts. His lifestyle in general

⁸ *Siyar al-'Alam al-Nubulā'*, 21, 367.

was beautiful.⁹ He also said: 'I believe there will not be another one like him.'¹⁰

Al-Hāfiz Ibn Rajab said: 'So we conclude that his gatherings of exhortation were one of a kind and nobody had heard of anything like them. They were gatherings of great benefit where the heedless would be reminded, the ignorant would come to know, the sinners would repent and the polytheists would become Muslims.'¹¹

His Works and Effects

Shaikh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah said in *al-Ajwiba al-Miṣriyyah*: 'Shaikh Abū'l-Faraj excelled in many sciences and has many writings to his account. He would write on many topics, and as I counted his works I found them to be over one thousand in number. Afterwards, I found out about other works as well.'¹²

Having mentioned some of his books, al-Dhahabī said: 'I don't know of a scholar who has written what this man has.'¹³

The virtuous teacher 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-'Alūjī has written a book on his works which was printed in Baghdād in 1965. In this piece he researched their titles, their copies and copies that had been

⁹ *Siyar al-A'lām al-Nubulā'*, 21/367.

¹⁰ *Siyar al-A'lām al-Nubulā'*, 21/384.

¹¹ *Thail Tabaqāt al-Ḥanabila*, 1/410.

¹² *Thail Tabaqāt al-Ḥanabila*, 1/415, *al-Tāj al-Mukallal*, 70.

¹³ *Tathkirat al-Huffāz*, 1344.

printed and put them in alphabetic order. Whoever wishes to know about these books should refer to this work, keeping in mind that many of the manuscripts mentioned therein by al-'Alūjī have now been printed.

He authored approximately 300 books, some of his printed works include:

- *Talqih Fuhūm Abli al-Athār fi Mukhtasari al-Siyari wal Akhbār.*¹⁴ [Only a portion has been printed]
- *Al-Athkiyā' wa Akhbārahum.*¹⁵ [Printed]
- *Manāqib 'Umar ibn 'Abdul 'Azīz.*¹⁶ [Printed]
- *Rawhu al-Arwāb.*¹⁷ [Printed]
- *Shudhūr al-'Uqūd fi Tarikh al-'Uhūd.*¹⁸ [Manuscript]
- *Zād al-Masir fi 'Ilm al-Tafsīr.*¹⁹ [Printed]
- *Al-Muntadham fi Tārikh al-Mulūk wal Umam.*²⁰ [Only 6 volumes have been printed]
- *Al-Dhabab al-Masbūk fi Siyaril Mulūk.*²¹ [Manuscript]
- *Al-Hamqa wal Mughaffalin.*²² [Printed]

¹⁴ The book mentions the historical reports concerning the Prophet (ﷺ) and his companions.

¹⁵ A literature book in which he includes stories of intellectual people..

¹⁶ The book details the virtues of the Caliph, 'Umar ibn 'Abdul-'Azīz.

¹⁷ The book explains the concept of spirit and spirituality

¹⁸ An abridged version of the known history book *Tarikh al-Mulūk wal Umam*.

¹⁹ The book explains the science of *Tafsīr*.

²⁰ The book mentions the history of nations and kings.

²¹ The book focuses on leaders and kings throughout history.

²² A literature book in which he reports the stories of idiots and fools.

- *Al-Wāfa fi Fada'ili al-Mustafa*.²³ [Printed]
- *Manaqib 'Umar ibn al-Khattab*.²⁴ [Printed]
- *Manaqib Aḥmad ibn Hanbal*.²⁵ [Printed]
- *Gharīb al-ḥadīth*.²⁶ [Printed]
- *Al-Tabqīq*.²⁷ [Only the first volume has been printed]

And also a considerable number of works in other fields of knowledge.

His Death

Ibn al-Jawzī passed away on Friday the 12th of Ramaḍān in 597 A.H and was buried next to the grave of Imām Aḥmad ibn Hanbal in the cemetery of Bāb Ḥarb.²⁸

²³ The book relates the virtues of the Prophet (ﷺ).

²⁴ The book relates the virtues of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab.

²⁵ The book relates the virtues of Imam Aḥmad ibn Hanbal.

²⁶ The book explains one major aspect of the science of ḥadīth i.e. the ghareeb ḥadīth.

²⁷ The book examines the authenticity of narrations used in the known book '*al-Ta'liq al-kabīr*' of al-Qadi Abū Ya'la, and how classification of ḥadīth effected scholars views.

²⁸ For a more detailed biography of al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn al-Jawzī, refer to: Ibn Athīr's *al-Kamil*, 12/71, Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī: *Mir'āt al-Zamān*, 8/481, al-Mundhirī: *al-Takmilā*, Biography 608, al-Bāghghal: *al-Masbyakba*, 140, Abū Shāmma: *Thail al-Raḥdatain*, 21, Ibn al-Sā'i: *al-Jāmi'*, 9/65, Ibn Khalkān: *al-Wāfiyāt*, 3/140, al-Dhahabī: *al-'Ibar*, 4/297, *Dīwal al-Islām*, 2/79, *Tathkirat al-Ḥuffāẓ*, 4/1342, *Siyar al-A'lām al-Nubulā'*, 21/365, Ibn Kathīr: *al-Bidāyah wa'l-Nihāyah*, 13/26, Ibn Rajab: *Thail Tabaqāt al-Ḥanabila*, 1/399, al-Jazari: *Ghāyat wa'l-Nihāyah*, 1/375, Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khan: *al-Tāj al-Mukallal*, 70, Ibn Shaṭṭī: *Mukhtasar Tabaqāt al-Ḥanabila*, p. 42.

INTRODUCTION

In the Name of Allāh, Most Beneficent, Most Merciful

THE ONE IN NEED OF THE Mercy of Allāh, Most High, the Shaykh, Imām Jamal al-Dīn Abū'l Faraj 'Abdu'l-Raḥman Ibn 'Alī Ibn Muḥammad Ibn al-Jawzī, may Allāh grant us benefit through him, said:

All praise is due to Allāh who gave us abundantly from His Blessings, accepted little praise (than what is due to Him) and preferred us to much of what He has created. May Allāh bestow His peace and blessing upon our master, Muḥammad, of whose kind He made no equivalent, and upon his Family and Companions, day and night.

I set out to collect the stories of the intelligent (*akhbār al-adhkiyā*), and reported some of what is conveyed from them to serve as examples (*mithāl*) to be followed, for indeed the stories of brave men teach bravery (*shijā'a*). But then I realised it would be better to collect the stories of the foolish and simpletons (*akhbār al-Ḥunqā wa'l-Mughafilin*). This was done for three reasons.

Firstly: When an intelligent person (*'āqil*) hears of their anecdotes, they will appreciate what Allāh has granted them, and this will encourage them to increase in their thankfulness (*shukr*) [to Allāh].

Muḥammad Ibn Nāsir Al-Ḥāfiẓ told us, conveying from Al-Ḥasan that he said, 'Allāh created Adam when he did, He took the people of Paradise (*Jannah*) out from his right-side, and the people of Fire (*Nār*) out from his left-side. So when they walked the earth - among them were the blind, the deaf and the disabled. Adam asked, 'O Allāh, why did You not make my children equal?' And He said, 'O Adam, I wanted to be thanked.'

Muḥammad Ibn 'Abdu'l-Mālik told us that Muḥammad Ibn Muslim said, 'A man spoke in the gathering of Ibn 'Abbās (*raḍiyAllāhu 'anhumā*), and made a lot of mistakes. Thereupon Ibn 'Abbās (*raḍiyAllāhu 'anhumā*) turned to a slave of his and freed him, so the man said to him, 'What are you being thankful for?' He replied, 'That Allāh did not make me like you.'

Secondly: Mentioning the foolish (*mughafilin*) entices a knowledgeable person to avoid the means of ignorance (*asbāb al-ghaflā*), in case it is an acquired trait, impacted by exercise (to overcome it). If negligence becomes an established trait however, it is almost unchangeable.

Third: As means of recreation by looking in the lives of those who were unfortunate (*mabkūsin*) in life, for the soul (*nafs*) might grow weary of diligence and hard work (*jad*). Hence seeking comfort in some of the permissible amusement (*lahw*). The Messenger (ﷺ) said to Ḥanzalah (*raḍiyAllāhu 'anhū*), "There is a time for this and a time for that."

Ḥanzalah (*raḍiy>Allāhu ‘anhū*) narrated that, ‘The Prophet (ﷺ) mentioned Paradise and Hell so much so that we were almost able to see them with our own eyes. Then I went out one day and met my family, together we laughed, and something moved within me.’ Then I met Abū Bakr and told him, ‘I have turned into a hypocrite.’ He said, ‘How so?’ I said, ‘When I am with the Prophet, he mentions Paradise and Hell so much so that I am almost able to see them with our own eyes, then I return to my family and laugh with them (i.e. losing the impact of what I experienced before).’ Abū Bakr (*raḍiy>Allāhu ‘anhū*) then said, ‘I also do that’. So I went to the Messenger and told him about it, he (ﷺ) said, “O Ḥanzalah, If your state when you are with your families was the same as the state you are in when you are with me, then the Angels would shake hands with you upon your bedding, and in your walkways. But O Ḥanzalah, there is a time for this and a time for that.”¹

Giving rest to the hearts is necessary and desired. ‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib (*raḍiy>Allāhu ‘anhū*) said, ‘Provide recreation for the hearts, and seek for them something of wisdom (*ḥikmah*), for they get bored as the bodies get bored.’”

Usāmah Ibn Zayd (*raḍiy>Allāhu ‘anhū*) said, ‘Relax the hearts in order for them to understand Allāh’s words.’

Al-Ḥasan (*raḍiy>Allāhu ‘anhū*) said, ‘These hearts live and die, so when they are alive, prompt them to do the recommended good deeds (*nāfila*). When they are dead, prompt them to do the compulsory good deeds. (*farīda*)’

Al-Zuhrī said, ‘A man used to sit with the Companions of the Prophet (ﷺ) and talk with them, when they increased in number

¹ Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, #2750.

and got weary of serious talk, he would say, "The ears are desorbing and the hearts are sour, so bring forth your poetry and stories."

Abū'l-Dardā' (*radīy Allāhu 'anhū*) also said, 'I amuse myself with some trivialities to avoid burdening it with serious matters until it grows weary.'

Muḥammad Ibn Ishāq conveyed that when Ibn 'Abbās (*radīy Allāhu 'anhumā*) sat down with his companions, he would teach them for a while then say, 'entertain us', and engage in the tales of the Arabs, and then he would do that repeatedly.'

It is narrated that Al-Zuhrī would say to his companions, 'Bring forth your poetry, bring forth your stories, for the ears are desorbing and the hearts are sour (from serious learning)'

Ibn Ishāq conveyed that Al-Zuhrī would teach and then afterwards say, 'Bring forth your humour. Bring forth your poetry. Engage in some of what amuses you and increases your friendliness, for the ears are desorbing and the hearts are unstable.'

Mālik Ibn Dinār said, 'When people before you got weary of serious discussion, they would say, 'the ears are desorbing and the hearts are sour, so bring forth your funny stories.'"

Abū Zayd said that his father told him, 'Aṭā' Ibn Yasār would talk to me and Abū Hāzim until we would weep, then he would talk to us until we would laugh', then he added, 'Sometimes like this, and sometimes like that.'

I say; scholars (*'ulamā'*) and the people of virtuous (*afāḍal*) still enjoy jokes and anecdotes. They are positive towards them since

they relax the soul and comfort the heart from the fatigue of contemplative thought.

Shu'bah used to teach and then say when he saw Al-Murīd Al-Nahawī:

The house of livestock did grow difficult for us
While the house spoke (and brought) us news

We have conveyed from Ibn 'Ā'isha funny stories, some of which included obscenity. A man once told him, 'Can this come from the likes of you?' He then replied, 'Woe to you, don't you see their (i.e. misguided people's) narrators?' Anyone from whom I conveyed from is better than everyone of our time. You are one however, who is inherently ugly, and so you assume ugly manifestations from others, while the essence of those people is better than what they manifest.'

People described a pious man to 'Ubayd-Allāh Ibn 'Ā'isha and said, 'He is serious all the time', and so he replied, 'He has constricted himself. Had he released it by moving from one state of mind to another, he would relieve it and return to seriousness with enthusiasm and (greater) strength.'

Al-Asma'ī said, 'I heard Harūn Al-Rashīd say, "Anecdotes sharpen minds and open ears.'

It was narrated that Hammād Ibn Salamah used to say, 'Only real men like witticism, and only false men hate it.'

Al-Asma'ī also said, 'I recited the following poem to Muḥammad Ibn 'Imrān Al-Tamīmī, the Judge of Madīnah, and I knew no wiser

judge than him:

‘O you who asks about my abode
I am staying in an inn, all by myself
Bread from the baker passes by
who neither accepts credit nor forgets
I eat from my sack and my clothing
Until my molars pain me’

So he said, ‘Write it for me.’ I said, ‘May Allāh rectify your affairs, you want this type of incidents written?’ Then he said, ‘Woe to you, write it, for the virtuous people admire witticism [witty remarks or stories].’

CHAPTER ONE

Scholars Seek Permissible Entertainment

IT IS CLEAR from what we mentioned that scholars allow permissible amusement (*lahwu*) for the soul, as it refreshes their energy in preparing them for more serious matters. In that sense, it is considered an aspect of seriousness.

Abū Firās said:

‘I refresh the heart with some banter
Out of inattention, not ignorance
I trifle [thing of little value or importance] therein is the
trifling [unimportant or trivial] of the virtuous
And joking sometimes, gives clarity to the intellect’

CHAPTER TWO

Comical Laughter that is Forbidden and that which is Permissible

THEREFORE, IF SOMEONE SAID, "Telling stories of fools and idiots entices laughter, and you have conveyed from the Prophet (ﷺ) that he said, "A man may say word to make his companions laugh, which will make him fall in Hellfire farther than the distance between Heaven and Earth." Then the answer is that this applies to whatever makes them laugh using lies that is stated in the ḥadīth explaining, "Woe to him who tells stories, speaking falsely, to make people laugh thereby." It is allowed for a person to intend to make another person laugh sometimes. In '*Afrad Muslim*' it is stated from the ḥadīth of 'Umar Ibn Al-Khaṭṭāb (*radīy>Allāhu 'anhu*) that he said, "I will speak to the Messenger (ﷺ) that he may laugh." He then proceeded, "...I (jokingly) said, 'If I found Bint Zayd, the wife of 'Umar, asking me for expenditure, I will wring her neck,'" so the Messenger (ﷺ) laughed.

What is not recommended is that making people laugh becomes

the habit of the person, for little laughter is not to be detested.

The Messenger (مُرْسَل) used to laugh until his premolars appeared, yet much laughter is loathed, for it is narrated that the he (مُرْسَل) said, "Much laughter kills the heart." Seeking comfort in such thing every now and then is like adding salt in the cooking pot (to enhance flavour).

I have divided this book into various topics¹, and titled them as follows:

Topic 1: Foolishness and its meaning

Topic 2: In clarifying the abundance of foolishness

Topic 3: The difference of people concerning foolishness

Topic 4: The names of the foolish

Topic 5: The attributes of the foolish

Topic 6: Warning against befriending a fool

Topic 7: The Arabs setting an example of the one whose foolishness is evident

Topic 8: The stories of those whose foolishness and idiocy were set as examples

Topic 9: The stories of some sane people who committed acts of foolishness

Topic 10: The idiots and fools among commanders and governors.

¹ [Publishers Note]: There were many more topics, however some of the topics were omitted from the English translation as they are only useful for the Arabic speaker who is familiar with Arabic grammar and morphology. For English speakers, it would be of little relevance.

CHAPTER THREE

What is Foolishness

IBN AL-'ARABĪ said, 'The Arabic word for foolishness is derived from 'marketplace-stagnation' (*ḥamaqt al-suq*), meaning that this person is of poor sell or of stagnant mind and opinion, so he should not be consulted or regarded in serious matters like war and battle strategies [i.e. lack of good sense or judgment which could lead to stupidity].

Abū Bakr Al-Makārim said, 'Pigweed (*baqla*) is called, 'foolish weed' (*ḥumqā'*) because it grows in water ways and in the path of camels.'

Ibn Al-'Arabī said, 'That is why a man is called foolish, because he does not distinguish his words from his folly.'

CHAPTER FOUR

The difference between Foolishness and Insanity

WE HAVE MENTIONED what is known linguistically, for the intent does not become apparent until the meaning is uncovered.

We say that the definition of foolishness (*hamiq*) and idiocy (*taghfi*) is: The error in the way and means to the goal, while the end may be correct. This is in contrast to insanity (*junūn*), which refers to flaws in both the end and the means. The foolish (*aḥmaq*) aims well, but his taking of the path is inappropriate (and corrupt), while believing that the path leads to the end and is incorrect. However, the origin of the madman's decision-making is corrupt, since he chooses what ought not to be chosen. This will be clarified with what we will relate about some of the foolish people.

For example: A pet bird flew away from a ruler. So he ordered that the gates of the city be closed! The aim of that man was to keep the bird from escaping in the open air.

CHAPTER FIVE

Clarifying the Abundance of Foolishness

A BŪ ISHĀQ SAID, 'If you come to learn that a rich man became poor, believe it. If you come to know that a poor man became rich, accept it. If you learn that a living person died, believe it - but if you learn that a foolish (*ahmaq*) person became intelligent (*'aql*), do not believe it.'

Qāḍī Abū Yūsuf said, 'From three stories; believe two and do not believe the third: If you were told that a man was with you, so he hid behind a wall and died, then believe it. If you were told that a poor man traveled to a place and earned money, believe it. But if you were told that a foolish person (*ahmaq*) traveled to a place and gained intellect (*'aql*), do not believe it.'

It was reported that Al-Awzā'ī used to say, 'It had reached me that 'Isā Ibn Maryam (*'alayhum as-salām*) was asked, 'O the Soul [that proceeded] from Allāh, do you bring life to the dead?' He said, 'Yes, with the permission of Allāh'. They said, 'And cure

those who were born blind?’ He said, ‘Yes, with the permission of Allāh’. They said, ‘So, what is the cure for foolishness?’ He said, ‘That is something which baffles me.’

Ja‘far Ibn Muḥammad said, ‘Manners for the fool is like water in the roots of colocynth², the more it is irrigated, the bitter it becomes.

Al-Mā‘mūn said, ‘Do you know what happened between me and **Amir** Al-Mu‘minīn, Harūn Al-Rashid? I did something inappropriate, so I entered upon him and greeted him; he said, ‘Go away, O fool.’ So I left angrily and did not enter upon him for days. Then he wrote to me saying:

I wish I knew, since you are excessive in desertion

Was it my fault or yours?

If you had wronged us, Allāh forgive you

And if I had wronged you, then forgive me

So, I went to him and he said, ‘If we were at fault, we have asked your forgiveness, and if you were at fault, we have forgiven you.’ I said to him, ‘You called me a fool, had you called me a foolhardy, it would have been easier on me’ He said, ‘What is the difference?’ I told him, ‘Foolhardiness comes from women, and catches the man from his long association with them. So, when he leaves them and accompanies real men, it leaves him. As for foolishness, it is a (mental) instinct, and some wise men said:

Curing the bodies is far easier when they are sick
than curing minds.

² A type of bitter apple

CHAPTER SIX

Differences of People Concerning Foolishness

WE HAVE STATED that foolishness is a corruption of the mind (*dahm*), and that whatever is in the original essence is an instinct that cannot be trained. Training is only useful for those whose essence is uncorrupt, so training can remove the corrupted extrinsic. Moreover, people vary in intellect (*'aql*), its essence and the amount they were granted thereof; that is why foolishness varies.

Ibrahīm Al-Nazzām was asked, ‘What are the limits of foolishness?’ He replied, ‘You asked about that which has no limits.’ ‘Umar (*radīy Allāhu ‘anhu*) once recited this verse.

يَأْتِيهَا الْإِنْسَانُ مَا غَرَّكَ رَبِّكَ أَكْرَبُ

“What has seduced thee from thy Lord Most Beneficent?”

[*al-Infītār* (82): 6]

and replied, "Folly [foolishness], O Allāh."

'Alī (*radīy Allāhu 'anhu*) said, 'Everybody has some kind of foolishness with which they live with.'

Abū'l-Dardā' (*radīy Allāhu 'anhu*) said, 'We are all fools in comparison to Allāh.'

Wahb Ibn Munabbih said, 'Allāh created man with an inherent (aspect of) foolishness, otherwise he would not have been satisfied with mere (worldly) living.'

Mutarraf said, 'If I swore, I would wish to confirm that there is none who is not a fool in what is between him and Allāh the Almighty.' And he used to say, "Everyone is a fool in what is between him and Allāh the Almighty. However, some foolishness is lighter than others.'

It was narrated that he also said, 'The intellect of people is in correspondence with their era.'

He also used to say, 'They are people and monkeys. And I see some people immersed in people's water.'³

Sufyān Al-Thawrī said, 'Man was created a fool to benefit from living.' Some people said (in poetry):

'I swear, you never miss anything due to injustice.

But in the minds is the illusion.'

³ What he might be implying is that some people get soiled with others' urine.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Names of the Foolish

[Note: This chapter lists the names a foolish person is called by. There are about 50 synonyms in this chapter, all of which implies foolishness or idiocy, some of them are for men and others are for women. If the readers have a good comprehension of the Arabic language, they should refer to the Arabic text of this book. Thus, consequently this chapter isn't translated as they all mean the same thing in English.]

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Attributes of the Fools

[Note: This chapter lists some of the characteristics of the foolish people. Although the modern world would not entirely agree with contents of such classifications - some of which are taken from discoveries made by ancient Greeks in the field of anatomy - traditional cultures around the world retain aspects of belief that concur with what is included herein. However, due to the offence this may cause readers, we have excluded much of the first half of the chapter from this publication].

Abū'l-Qāsim 'Abdu'l-Rahmān Ibn Muḥammad told us, 'I was told that when Al-Mahdī⁴ was done with 'Isā Badh⁵, he rode there in a small caravan to have a look. He ordered that everyone who was there to be taken out. However two people remained who were hidden from his agent's eyes. When he saw one of them, he

⁴ Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad Ibn 'Abdullāh al-Manṣur, he was the third Abbasid Caliph.

⁵ A district that used to be in East Baghdad.

became puzzled, uncomprehending, so he asked him, 'Who are you?' He replied, 'I, am I [me].' He said, 'Woe to you! Who are you?' The man said, 'I do not know!' He said, 'Is there something you need?' He said, 'No, No.' Al-Mahdī then said, 'Get him out of here, may Allāh take his soul.' So they pushed him by the back of his neck, forcing him out. Al-Mahdī told his servant, 'Follow him secretly without him knowing, ask about his matter and his job, for I think he is a tailor.' So, the boy went after him.

Then he saw the other man and asked him the same questions. But this man answered with a strong determination, he was eloquent and very articulate. Al-Mahdī said, 'Who are you?' He said, 'A man from your movement.' He asked, 'So, what brought you here?' He said, 'I came to look at this beautiful building, enjoy the scenery and pray for Amir Al-Mu'minīn to have a long reign, complete with blessing and an increase in glory and safety.' He said, 'Is there something you need?' He said, 'Yes. I proposed to my cousin, her father rejected me and said, 'You have no wealth,' people desire wealth, and I am fond of her.' Al-Mahdī then said, 'I have ordered that you be granted fifty thousand dirhams.' In response the man said, 'May Allāh allow me to lay my life for you, O Amir Al-Mu'minīn. You have maintained the ties, this is an abundant maintenance, you have endowed me a great endowment. May Allāh make the remaining of your life longer than what has passed you by, and the last of your days better than the first. May He let you enjoy his favours to you, and let your subjects enjoy you.' So he ordered to make him from his inner circles, and instructed some of his associates and said, 'Ask about his job, for I feel he is a scribe.'

So, when the first messenger came back, he said, 'I found the man to be a tailor,' and when second the messenger came back, he said, "I found him to be a writer.' Al-Mahdī said, 'I could tell

by speaking with the tailor and the writer.’

It was narrated that Mu‘āwiyah (*radīy Allāhu ‘anhu*) asked his companions, ‘How do you recognise the fool without accompanying him?’ Some of them said, ‘From his walk, looks and hesitation.’ So he said, ‘The folly of a man is rather known by his nickname or the inscription of his signet-ring [with letters or design carved on it].’” And while they were engaging in such a discussion, a man called for another, ‘O Abū’l-Yaqūt’, so Mu‘āwiyah (*radīy Allāhu ‘anhu*) called for him, who was a man wearing a gown, so he spoke with him for a while then asked, ‘What is that on your signet-ring’s stone?’ He said,

لَا أَرَى الْهَذَّاءَ مَكَانَ مِنَ الْغَائِبِينَ

“Why do I not see the hoopoe - or is he among the absent?”

[*al-Naml* (27) : 20]

They then said, ‘O Amir Al-Mu‘minīn, the matter is as you said.’

It was narrated that Imām al-Shāfi‘ī said, ‘If you see a man’s ring to be large and its stone to be small, then he is an intelligent person. If you see its silver to be little and its stone to be large, then he is helpless. If you see a writer’s inkwell on his left, then he is not a writer, but if it is on his right and his pen behind his ear, then he is a writer.’

The Second Classification: Regarding traits (*kbisāl*) and actions (*af‘āl*): They include disregarding of consequences, easily trusting whom one does not know or even speak to nor have ties of friendship with. It includes having pride (*‘yjb*) and talking too much (*kathurat al-kalām*).

Abū'l-Dardā' (*radīy>Allāhu 'anhu*) said, 'Do not be fooled by a man's wit and eloquence (*fasāha*). Even if you see him praying all night (*qā'im al-layl*) and fasting all day (*sā'im al-nahār*). If you see three traits in him: (having) pride (*'ujb*); speaking too much (*kaṭṭurat al-muntiq*) in what does not concern him; and being angry with people for doing what he sometimes does. These are the signs of the ignorant (*alāma' al-jāhil*).'

'Umar Ibn 'Abdu'l-'Azīz said, 'As long as you do not get rid of the fool (*aḥmaq*), you will not get rid of two traits: Giving answers quickly (*sur'at al-jawāb*) and frequent flip flopping (*kaṭṭuar al-iltifāt*).' A man once spoke up in Mu'āwiyah's counsel, he talked so excessively until Mu'āwiyah got bored, so he said him, 'Be silent!' the man replied, 'Did I even speak?'

The signs of a fool include being essentially void of knowledge (*'ilm*), for the intellect (*'aql*) must encourage the person to acquire some knowledge, even little. Therefore, if old age sets in without acquiring any knowledge, it indicates foolishness (*ḥamq*).

Al-A'mash said, 'If I see an old man having no knowledge, I feel like slapping him.'

'Abdullāh Ibn Mu'āwiyah Ibn Abī Ṭālib was a friend of Al-Walid Ibn 'Abdu'l-Mālik who visited and entertained him. They sat down to play chess. As they were playing they were interrupted by the guardsman who came in and said, 'Allāh bless you, O Amir, a man from your uncles has come, from the nobles of Thaḳīf, he is a fighter, and he wished to greet you.' Al-Walid said, 'Leave him [i.e ignore him] .' So, 'Abdullāh said, 'It is alright. Let him in and we shall continue playing later'. He called for a napkin to be placed [on the game], and said, 'Let's greet the man and then we shall

return.' Al-Walid did so and said, 'Let him in.' He was a man with prestige, between his eyes was the trace of prostration, he was wearing a turban and he had combed his beard. He saluted the ruler then said, 'Allāh bless the Amir, I came as a fighter and did not wish to pass by without fulfilling your due right.' 'Abdullāh said, 'May Allāh bless you.' Then he stopped talking to him until he became acquainted with him. Al-Walid came to him and said, 'O uncle, did you learn the Qur'ān?' He said, 'No. We were occupied by other things.' He said, 'Did you memorise something of the Sunnah, war stories or ḥadīths of the Prophet (ﷺ)?' He said, 'No. We were occupied by other things.' He said, 'What about the stories and poems of the Arabs?' He said, 'No. We were occupied by other things.' He said, 'What about the stories and jokes of the people of Hijāz?' He said, 'No.' He said, 'What about the stories and literature of non-Arabs?' He said, 'That is something which I did not seek.' Al-Walid then raised the napkin off chess board and said, 'Checkmate,' so 'Abdullāh Ibn Mu'āwiyah said, 'Glory be to Allāh!'⁶ Al-Walid said, 'No! by Allāh, there is nobody else in the house with us.' So, when the man saw this he left and they continued their play.'

The attributes of the fool (*kisāl al-aḥmaq*) include being pleased with false praise (*madḥ*), and being moved by ego trip [or self-flattery]; even if he was unworthy of it.

It was narrated that Al-Ḥasan Ibn 'Alī (*radīy Allāhu 'anhuma*) said, 'Walking after the fools rarely allows one to remain (sane).'

Zayd Ibn Khālid said, "Nobody is more foolish than a rich person (*ghani*) who feels secure from poverty (*faqr*), and a poor man (*faqir*) who despairs of richness (*ghinā*)."

⁶ A phrase to express exclamation

Al-Asma'ī said, 'If you wish to know the level of a man's intellect in one sitting, then speak to him about baseless issues [vain or pointless matters]; if you find him listening and accepting it, then he is a fool. But if he disproved it, then he is intelligent (*'āqil*).'

A wise man once said, 'The traits of foolishness (*bamaq*) include rashness (*'ajala*), lack of due respect (*kbafā*), disaffection (*jiffā*), arrogance (*guriir*), immorality (*fajiir*), weak-mindedness (*sifā*), ignorance (*jahl*), slackness (*tawāni*), betrayal (*kbiyana*), oppression (*ẓulm*), extravagance (*diyā'*), carelessness (*tafrih*), unawareness (*ghafla*), delight (*surūr*), pride (*kbijāla*), excessive indulgence (*fjir*) and cunningness (*maker*). He is ungrateful in his self-sufficiency (*batr*), despairing in his poverty, excessively proud in his happiness, obscene in his speech, stingy (*bukhl*) when asked and persistent when asking. If he speaks, he does it poorly, and if he is spoken to, he does not comprehend. If he laughs, he brays [like the loud, cry of a donkey or mule], and if he cries, he screams.'

Another wise man said, 'A fool is recognised by six traits: Anger (*ghadab*) for no reason, giving not one's due right, speaking uselessly, trusting everybody, blabbing secrets (*jfshā' al-sirr*), not distinguishing his friend (*sadiq*) from his foe (*'adu*), speaking whatever is on his mind, and imagining himself to be the most intelligent.'

Abū Ḥatīm Ibn Ḥayyān Al-Ḥāfiẓ said, 'The signs of foolishness are giving quick answers, disregarding verification, excessive laughing, frequent turning around, backbiting good people and associating with evil people. If you turn away from the fool, he is upset, and if you turn to him, he is excessively proud of himself. If you are gentle to him, he is mean to you. If you are mean to him, he is gentle to you. If you treat him nicely, he treats you badly, and if you treat him badly, he treats you nicely. If you are

unjust to him, you will get your justice, and if you give him justice, he will be unjust to you.

Therefore, whoever is tried with the company of the fool should be thankful to Allāh for giving him what He deprived the other of.’

Muḥammad Al-Shāmī said:

We have a companion who turned his back to manners

His companions are in distress of his speech

He is ignorantly angry when he ought to be pleased

And is pleased when he ought to be angry

CHAPTER NINE

Warning Against Befriending a Fool

ALĪ IBN ABĪ ṬĀLIB (*raḍiy>Allāhu ‘anhu*) said, ‘Do not befriend the fool, for he gives you advice and exhausts himself wrongly. Perhaps he wishes to benefit you, but in reality he harms you. His silence is better than his speech, his farness is better than his nearness, and his death is better than his life.’

Ibn Abū Ziyād said, ‘My father told me, ‘Son, keep close to intelligent people and associate with them, and avoid fools (*ḥumqā*); for whenever I left after sitting down with a fool, I found that my intellect has decreased.’

‘Abdullāh Ibn Ḥubayq said, ‘Allāh, the Almighty revealed to Mūsā (*‘alayhi as-salām*), “Do not be angry with fools, or your distress will increase.”

Al-Ḥasan (*raḍiy>Allāhu ‘anhu*) is narrated to have said, ‘Deserting the fool brings you closer to Allāh, the Almighty.’

Salmān Ibn Mūsā said, "Three kinds of people are deprived of justice from three types of oppressors: A forbearing (*ḥalīm*) from a fool (*aḥmaq*), an honourable (*sharīf*) from a wretched (*dani*), and a pious (*barr*) from a evil [or a sinner] (*fājir*)."

We also conveyed from Al-Aḥnaf Ibn Qays that he said - conveying from Al-Khalīl Ibn Aḥmad, 'People are divided into four kinds: A person who knows and is aware that he knows, this one is a scholar (*ʿālim*) - so follow him. A person who knows but is unaware that he knows, he is forgetful (*nās*) - so remind him. A person who does not know and is aware that he does not know, this one is a student (*tālib*) - so teach him. Finally, a person who does not know and is unaware that he does not know, this one is a fool (*aḥmaq*) - so reject him.'

He also said, "There are four types of people, so speak to three and do not speak to the fourth: A person who knows and is aware that he knows, speak to him. A person who knows but is unaware that he knows, speak to him. A person who does not know and is aware that he does not know, also speak to him; and a person who does not know and is unaware that he does not know, so do not speak to him.'

Ja'far Ibn Muḥammad said, 'People are divided into four types: A person who knows and is aware that he knows, that is a scholar (*ʿālim*) - so follow him. A person who knows and is unaware that he knows, he is asleep (*nā'im*) - wake him up. A person who does not know and is aware that he does not know, that is ignorant (*jahl*) one - teach him. Finally, a person who does not know and is unaware that he does not know, that is a fool (*aḥmaq*) - avoid him.'

We have narrated that Al-Qāḍī Abū Yūsuf said, "There are three kinds of people: mad (*majnūn*), half-mad (*nisf al-majnūn*) and intel-

ligent (*'āqil*). With the mad and the half-mad, you are in comfort (*rahā*). As for the intelligent, you have been sufficed his provision."

It is narrated that Al-A'mash said, 'Blaming the fool is like blowing air in a sack of wool.'

'Abdullāh Ibn Dāwūd Al-Khuraybī said, 'Every foolish friend is more dangerous to you than your enemy.'

Bishr Ibn Al-Hārith is narrated to have said, 'Looking at the fool is a discomfort to the eye.' I heard him say, 'There will come a time when authority will be in the hands of fools.' He is also narrated to have said, 'The fool is a discomfort to the eye; whether present or absent.'

Shu'ba said, 'Our intellect is weak, so if we sit with the less intelligent, that little intelligence you have will go away [disperse]. Whenever I see a man sitting with a less intelligent person, I dislike him.'

A wise man said, 'The sane person's provision is his responsibility, and the fool's provisions is the responsibility of others (towards him). Whoever has no intellect has nothing in this world or the Hereafter.'

Another wise man said, 'Not everybody is capable of handling the fool, but I am.' He was asked, 'How?' He said, 'I give him less than his due for him to ask exactly for his due, because whenever I give him his due, he will ask for more.'

It was said - in poetry:

Beware the fool and his company
For the fool is like an old dress
Whenever you patch one side of it
The wind tears it [in another spot]

Or like a crack in a weak glass
Did you see a glass crack get healed?

Or like the donkey; if you feed it
it runs around, and when it's hungry it brays

Or the wicked servant; if you starve him
he steals from people,
and if you feed him he indulges in evil and sin
And if you blame him in order to stop it
He spoils the counsel with his stupidity

CHAPTER TEN

Arabs Setting a Parable of the Ones who's Foolishness is Evident

THE ARAB SET EXAMPLE of fools, sometimes of whose foolishness is well known, sometimes of foolish acts of birds and animals, and other times of things that do not act, but whose actions would be foolish if they were imagined.

As for parables about people whose foolishness is well known, Abū Ḥilāl Al-'Askarī said: "The Arabs say: "More foolish than Habnaqa", whose stories will follow, and "more foolish than Ḥadhanah".

It is said this is a certain man, some say that it refers to a man with small ears, light head and little brains that make him a fool, and it is also said that Ḥadhanah is a woman who used to blow her nose with her wrist bones.

The Arabs also say: "More foolish than Abū Ghabshān", "More

foolish than Johā”, “More foolish than ‘Ajl Ibn Lujaym”, “More foolish than Ḥujaynah” who was a man from Banu al-Ṣadā’ clan; “More foolish than Bayhas”, “More foolish than Mālik Ibn Zayd Manāh”, “More foolish than ‘Adyy Ibn Ḥabbāb”, and “More foolish than the woman whose dowry was one of her anklets”.

As for parables about animals, they say: “More foolish than a hyena”, “more foolish than Umm ‘Āmir”, “more foolish than a ewe on a water basin” because when it reaches water, it bends down without pause, and “more foolish than a she-wolf” because it leaves her baby and breast-feeds the hyena’s baby.

As for parables about birds, they say: “More foolish than a pigeon” because it does not repair its nest, so its egg tend to fall down and break, and it may lay its eggs on wedges causing them to fall, “more foolish than an ostrich” because when it passes by other ostriches’ eggs, it takes it and leaves its own, “more foolish than a vulture”, “more foolish than a magpie” because it loses its eggs and youngsters, and “more foolish than a curlew (a large wading bird of the sandpiper family)” because when it sees people, it falls on the road so that they take it.

Among the animals accused of foolishness, the North African blue crane (bird), the ewe (female sheep), the camel, the peacock and the giraffe.

As for the parables of things that have no action, like their saying “more foolish than purslane (common plant)” and the foolish weed “Pigweed” since it grows in riverbeds.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Stories of those whose Foolishness and Idiocy were Set as Parables

These are divided into men and women.

They include stories of 'Habnaqa': whose real name is Yazid Ibn Tharwān, some say Ibn Marwān, a member of Banu Qays Ibn Tha'laba's clan. His foolishness is manifest in that he put on a necklace made of cowrie shells, bones and pottery and said, 'I fear I may lose myself, so I did this in order to be identify by it.' One night, the necklace was moved from his neck to his brother's neck, so when he woke up he said, 'O brother, you are me, so who am I?'

He once lost a camel, so he went around calling, 'Whoever finds it can have it.' He was asked, 'So, why are you looking for it?' He said, 'For the pleasure of finding it!' In another version he said, 'Whoever finds it shall have ten camels,' and when he was asked, 'Why are you doing that?' he said, 'For the pleasure of finding it!'

They also include the two clans story: Banu Tafāwa and Banu

Rāsib; argued over a man, each claimed he was from one of their clan, so Habnaqa said, 'The judgment is that he should be thrown in water, so if he floats, he is from *Ṭafāwa*⁷, and if he precipitates, he is from Rāsib!' The man then said after hearing this judgement, 'If that is the judgment, then I abstain from both clans.'

When he used to herd sheep, he would direct the fat ones for food and keep the skinny ones away and say, 'I do not repair what Allāh had corrupted.'

They also include Abū Ghabshān: Who is of Khuzā'a clan; he was the guardian over the Ka'bah⁸. He once met with Quṣay Ibn Kilāb⁹ in Ṭā'if to drink, so when he became drunk, Quṣay bought the guardianship of Ka'bah from him for a sack of wine, he then took the keys, went to Makkah and said, 'O people of Quraysh, these are the keys of the House of your grandfather, Ismā'il (*'alayhi as-salām*). Allāh returned it to you without treachery or oppression.' When Abū Ghabshān returned to consciousness, he felt regret, giving rise to the phrases: 'More regretful than Abū Ghabshān'; 'a worse loser than Abū Ghabshān' and, 'more foolish than Abū Ghabshān'. Someone said:

Khuzā'a sold the house of Allāh, while drunk
For a sack of wine, what a wretched transaction
It sold its guardianship for wine, and went away
from the standing place; the house and the caller were lost

⁷ *Ṭafāwa* literally means Flootation, while Rasib means precipitate.

⁸ The Masjid al-Harām in Makkah, Saudi Arabia.

⁹ Quṣay Ibn Kilāb was the leader of Quraysh in his time and was the fifth great-grandfather of Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ). His father died while he was a child.

Then Khuzā'a came and tried to defeat Qusay, but he prevailed.

They also include the story the Shaikh of Mahw: which is a clan of the descendants of 'Abdu'l-Qays, whose name is 'Abdullāh Ibn Baydara. The clan of Iyād was disgraced for (frequent) passing of wind, and one of them went to Ukaz market with two gowns and yelled, "O people, I am from 'Iyād. Who wants to buy the disgrace of farting in exchange for these two gowns?" 'Abdullāh Ibn Baydara came and said, 'I will.' And he wore both gowns. The man from 'Iyād asked people of other clans to be witnesses for the incident, and 'Abdullāh returned to his people saying, 'I brought you the eternal disgrace.' And so the disgrace stuck to 'Abdu'l-Qays clan.

They also include the story 'Ajl Ibn Lujaym: His foolishness was evident when he was asked, 'What did you name your horse?' So he went up to it, gouged one of its eyes and said, 'I named it the one-eyed (*al-a'war*).'

Al-'Anzī said in lines of poetry:

The descendants of 'Ajl accused me of their ancestor's illness

And who among people is more foolish than 'Ajl?

Their ancestor was disgraced for his horse's eye

And so, he became a standard for ignorance.

They also include story of Ḥamzah Ibn Bayḍ: Abū Ṭālib 'Umar Ibn Ibrāhīm said, 'Ḥamzah Ibn Bayḍ called for a cupper, who was annoying and talkative. When he sharpened his razors, Ḥamzah said to him, 'Will it hurt me now?' He said, 'No.' Ḥamzah said, 'Leave it today. Leave and come back tomorrow.' The man said,

'You don't know what could happen until tomorrow. The razors are sharp, and it is only a moment away.' He said, 'If it is as you say, then give me one of your testicles to be held as a hostage in my hand, so that if you hurt me I can hurt you.' The cupper said, 'I think you should forget about bloodletting (i.e. cupping) this year,' and left immediately.

Muḥammad Ibn Al-'Alā', the writer, said, 'Ḥamzah Ibn Bayḍ said to his servant, 'On which day did we pray the Friday Prayer in Rasāfah?' The servant thought for a while and then said, 'Tuesday'

Ḥamzah Ibn Bayḍ was asked, 'How much wine do you drink?' He said, 'A little over two pounds.'

They also include the story Abū Usayd: Muḥammad Ibn Rajā' said, 'Abū Usayd spoke, during Al-Mahdī's reign before Al-Mansour's death, and said, 'Two camels passed by me.' So, people around him asked, 'Which one was more beautiful?' He said, 'One of them was more beautiful than the other.' They said, 'Which one was it?' He said, "The latter was more beautiful than the former.'

Muḥammad Ibn 'Abdu'l-Muttalib said, 'Abū Usayd looked at a sleeping man and said to him, 'Wake up! How long will you sleep like a herd of camel?'

Abū Usayd was asked, 'Tell us of Ibn 'Umar (*radīy Allāhu 'anhū*).' He said, 'He used to shave his moustache until the whiteness of his armpits appeared.'

They also include the story of Johā: Known as Abū'l-Ghusn. Some of what is narrated from him indicates wit and cleverness, but most of it reflects idiocy. It is said that some of his enemies

made up stories about him, but Allāh knows best.

It is narrated that Makkī Ibn Ibrāhīm said, 'I found Johā to be a witty funny man. That which is said about him is lies, for he had cowardly neighbours with whom he used to banter and who used to banter with him; they made up these stories.'

Abū Bakr Al-Kalbī said, 'I left Baṣrah, and when I arrived at Kūfah, I found an old man sitting in the sun, so I said, 'Old man! Where is Al-Ḥakam's house?' He said, 'After you.' So, I went back and he said, 'Glory be to Allāh!¹⁰ I tell you that it is after you and you go back?'

Ikrimah told me, on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās (*radīy Allāhu 'anhumā*), with regards to Allāh's saying,

وَكَانَ وَرَاءَهُمْ مَلِكٌ يَأْخُذُ كُلَّ سَفِينَةٍ غَصْبًا

"As there was after them a king who seized every ship by force."

[*al-Kalbf* (18): 79]

that it means 'in front of them'. I asked, 'Who are you?' He said, 'Abū'l-Ghusn, I then asked, 'The name?' He said, 'Johā.' This story was narrated to us differently.

Abbad Ibn Suhayb said, 'I arrived at Kūfah to hear from Ismā'il Ibn Abi Khālid, and passed by an old man sitting, so I said, 'Old man, how do I reach the house of Ismā'il Ibn Abī Khālid?' He said, 'It is after you.' I asked, 'Should I go back?' He said, 'I tell you it is after you and you ask go back!' I asked, 'Does not after me mean behind me?' He said, 'No.'

¹⁰ A phrase used for exclamation.

Then he said, 'Ikrimah told me, on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās (radiy>Allāhu 'anhumā), that

وَكَانَ وَرَاءَهُمْ

“as there was after them”

[*al-Kahf*(18): 79]

means 'in front of them.' I said, 'By Allāh, tell me who you are, old man.' He said, 'I am Johā.’

The author said: 'Most of what is narrated from Johā is idiocy, which we will convey as we heard it.'

Abū'l-Ḥasan narrates that a man said to Johā, 'I heard screams coming from your house.' He said, 'My shirt fell from above.' The man replied, 'What's that got to do with it?' He said, 'You Fool! Had I been wearing it, it would not have fallen screaming!'

Abū Maṣū'ir Al-Tha'ālabī narrated in the book '*Ghurar Al-Nawādir*', 'Abū'l-Ghusn was once annoyed by the wind, so he spoke to it, 'No one knows you except Sulaymān (*'alayhi as-salām*), the son of Dāwūd (*'alayhi as-salām*) who captured you until you ate your own stool.'

Once on a cold day He got out of the bath, and the wind hit him. He inadvertently touched his testicles and found that one of them had shrunk. In a panic he rushed back to the bath room in search for it. Later when asked, 'What is wrong with you?' He said, 'One of my testicles was stolen!' However when he eventually became warm, the testicle returned. When he discovered it again, he prostrated to Allāh in gratitude, saying, 'Whatever was not taken by hand, is not lost.'

One of his neighbour died, so he called for the gravedigger to dig his grave, when he arrived they argued about the gravedigger's fee. So, Johā went to the market and bought a piece of wood for two dirhams. When asked about it he said, 'The gravedigger does not dig for less than five dirhams, and I bought this piece of wood for two dirhams for us to crucify him on it, this will save us three dirhams and relieve him of the questioning of Munkar and Nakir.'¹¹

It is said that Johā incensed himself one day, and his clothes were burned, so he got mad and said, 'I swear to Allāh, I will not incense myself except naked.'

One day, an intense wind came, so people hastened to pray to Allāh and repent from their sins, so Johā yelled out, 'O people, do not hasten to repentance; it is just a storm and it will pass.'

It is said that dust gathered on Johā's father's door from demolitions, so the father said, 'Now the neighbours will compel me to remove that dust, and I will need supplies, and it is not suitable for making bricks; I don't know what to do with it.' Johā said to him, 'If you could not make use of this dust, then I wonder what you are good at.' His father said, 'So, tell us what you would do with it then.' He said, 'We should dig holes and press the dust into the ground.'

He bought flour one day, and loaded it onto a carrier, but carrier took off with the flour. Then a few days later, Johā saw him, and he hid from the carrier. When asked, "Why do you do this?" He said, 'I fear that he would ask me for payment for carrying the flour.'

His father sent him to buy a grilled animal head, so he did. He then sat down on the road side and ate its eyes, ears, tongue and

¹¹ The two angels who test the faith of the dead in their graves.

brain. He then carried the rest to his father, who said, 'Woe to you! What is this?' He said, 'That is the head that you requested.' He said, 'So where are the eyes?' Johā said, 'It was blind.' He asked, 'Where are the ears?' He said, 'It was deaf.' He asked, 'So where is the tongue?' He said, 'It was mute.' The father asked, 'So where is the brain?' Johā said, 'It was bald.' His father said, 'Woe to you! Return it and take back your money.' He said, 'The seller sold it with immunity from all defects.'

It is told that Johā buried some money in the desert, and marked money with a cloud in the sky.

His father died, so he was told, 'Go and buy the funeral cloth.' He said, 'I fear that if I buy them, I will miss the funeral prayer.'

It is narrated that Al-Mahdī brought him to banter with him, and ordered his servants to bring a leather mat [that is usually placed under the person sentenced to death] and a sword. So when he was put on the mat, he told the executioner, 'Do not hit the areas where I had undergone bloodletting, for I have recently undergone cupping.'

People saw him running in the market one day, and they asked him, 'What is with you?' He said, 'Did you see the slave girl of a man with a dyed beard?'

He once passed by the door of a main masjid, and asked, 'What is this?' He was told, 'This is Al-Jāmi' Masjid [Al-Jāmi' means the main masjid of this locality].' He said, 'May Allāh have mercy on Jāmi's soul, for he built this masjid so nicely.'

He passed by some people, while he had peaches in his sleeve, so he asked them, 'Whoever can tell me what is in my sleeve, I

shall give him a peach therefrom.' So they said, 'Peaches.' He said, 'Whoever told you that is a son of a prostitute.'

He heard someone say, 'How beautiful is the moon!' So he replied, 'Yes, especially at night.'

A man once told him, 'Can you do maths with your fingers?' He said, 'Yes.' The man told him, 'Take two measures of wheat,' and Johā crossed the ring and pinky fingers. He told him, 'Take two measures of barley,' and he crossed the index and thumb fingers, and extended the middle finger. The man said, 'Why did you extend the middle finger?' He said, 'So that the wheat and barley do not get mixed together.'

He passed one day by children playing with a dead bird, so he bought it from them for one dirham and carried it home. His mother said, 'Woe to you! What will you do with a dead bird?' He said, 'Be quiet, if it had been alive, I would not have dreamt to buy it even for a hundred dirhams.'

His father was leaving for pilgrimage to Makkah so he said while seeing him off, "By Allāh, do not stay away for too long, and try to return by 'Eid for the animal sacrifice."

They also include the story of Muzbid: Abū Zayd said, 'Muzbid was told, 'Such-and-such gravedigger has died.' He said, 'Allāh curse him! Whoever digs a bad grave shall fall therein.'

Muzbid said to a man, 'Would it please you to take a thousand dirham and jump from the roof top of a house? The man said, 'No.' Muzbid said, 'I wish I would get a thousand dirham; I am prepared to jump off heights as high as the starts in the sky.' The man said, 'Woe to you! If you jump, you will die.' He said, 'What

do you know! I might fall in haystacks or on Zubaydah's¹² bed.'

He was once told, 'Would you like to have this garment?' He said, 'Yes, and you may lash me twenty times in exchange.' They said, 'What makes you say that?' He said, 'You cannot have something without giving something in return.'

They also include story of Azhar the donkey: He was sitting at the council of the Prince 'Amr Ibn Al-Layth eating a watermelon. 'Amr asked him, 'Does it taste good?' He said, 'Have you ever eat feces?'

A messenger came to Prince 'Amr from the Sultan, so he brought the dining table and told Azhar, "Bless us with your silence today," so he remained silence for a while but could not help it and said, 'I built in the village a tower that is a thousand-feet high.' The doorkeeper signaled him to be quiet but the messenger asked him, 'How wide is it?' He said, 'one foot wide.' The messenger said, 'Something that is a thousand feet high cannot be one foot wide.' He said, 'I wanted to say more, but that doorkeeper stopped me.'

Another messenger came, so Azhar was told, 'Do not speak today and be on your best behaviour for that messenger.' So he remained silent for a while, then the messenger sneezed, so Azhar wanted to bless him - to say 'Allāh bless you' - but instead said, 'May Allāh give you a good morning.' The prince said, 'Have I not told you to keep quiet?' He said, 'I did not want the messenger to return to Baghdad and say: These people don't even know Arabic.'

The doctor told him, "Take two pomegranate fruits, squeeze

¹² Zubaidah is the wife of Harun Al-Rashid.

them with their fat and drink their juice." So he brought two pomegranate fruits and a piece of fat, pounded them together, squeezed them and drank their juice.

They also include the story of Abū Muḥammad Jāmīʿ, the pharmacist: 'Alī Ibn Mu'ādh said, 'I wrote a letter to Jāmīʿ the pharmacist, so he wrote his letter and made the address 'To the man who wrote to me.'

People came to him with a matter related to a wall, and said, 'Abū Muḥammad, since when do you know this wall?' He said, 'I know it since it was young, owned by such-and-such.'

He was asked once, 'How old are you?' He said, 'Seventy-one years.' He was asked, "Who do you remember from the sons of Al-'Abbās?' He said, 'Itākh'¹³

He rode on a boat and gave the sailor a piece of coin, so he asked for more, Jāmīʿ said, 'May Allāh disfigure me into a four-legged creature like you if I gave you anymore.'

He went to the market to buy a shoe for his son; the seller asked him, 'How old is he?' He said, 'I don't know, but he was born when the Dāriyan¹⁴ grapes first ripened. My son, Muḥammad, Allāh bless him, is eight months older than him.'

He had a daughter, and he was asked how old she is, he said, 'I only know that she was born in the days of fleas.'

¹³ A Turkish military leader, imprisoned by Al-Mutawakkil, and he died of thirst in 235H.

¹⁴ Belongs to Darraya, a village then, a suburb now, of Damascus.

His toilet once squirted water, so he said to his boy, ‘Hurry and get someone to fix it, so that we eat it before it eats us.’

His son went to pilgrimage one year, so he said to him, ‘Son, you know I can’t endure your absence. So try hard to perform the animal sacrifice with us; you know that your mother does not eat on Eid until you return from the prayers.’

They also include the story of Abū ‘Abdullāh al-Jassās: It was narrated that he ate with the minister one day, so when he finished eating he said, ‘Praise is due to Allāh; there is no one greater than Him to be sworn by.’

He looked inside the *Mushaf* (copy of the Qur’ān) one day and said, ‘By Allāh it is so cheap. That is from the favour of Allāh. I eat and enjoy myself for one dirham.’ And when he looked in the *Mushaf*, he read the verse,

ذَرَّهُمْ يَأْكُلُوا وَيَتَمَتَّعُوا

“Let them eat and enjoy themselves”

[*al-Hijr* (15) 3],

but he misread “*dharhumr*. let them be” to be “*dirham*”.

One day, Ibn Al-Jassās entered upon Ibn Al-Furāt, the minister of Khāqānī, he while was holding a watermelon his hand. He wanted to serve it to the minister and then spit in Tigris river, but he instead spat in the minister’s face and threw the watermelon in Tigris. The minister was shocked and Ibn Al-Jassās was vexed and said, ‘I swear by Allāh, the Great, I made a mistake. I wanted to spit in your face and then throw the watermelon in Tigris.’ The minister told him, ‘That is what you did, you idiot.’ So, he was at fault both in action and in apology.

He looked in the mirror one day and said, 'O Allāh, turn our faces white on the Day that some faces will turn white, and turn them black on the Day that some faces will turn black.'

He said one day, 'I desire a she-mule like the she-mule of the Prophet (ﷺ) to name her 'Duldul'.

One day, he looked at the mirror, and said to someone with him, 'Do you think my beard has grown tall?' The man said, 'The mirror is in your hand.' He said, 'You are right. But the present sees what the absent does not.'

Once, he was breaking almonds, so one almond flew away, he said, "There is no deity except Allāh!¹⁵ Everything tries to escape death, even the animals.'

He once gave some nabk as a present to the minister Al-'Abbās Ibn Al-Aḥnaf, and wrote on it, 'I gave you this nabk, hoping that you would live for long.' He wrote in reply, 'You did not become like an elephant¹⁶, you became like a cow.'

Ibn Al-Jassās used to supplicate every day and say, 'We seek refuge in Allāh from His blessings, repent to Him from His grace, resign from His granted wellbeing, and ask Him for stumbling blocks. Sufficient for me is Allāh, His Prophets, and His honourable Angels.'

He used to pray, 'O Allāh, bless us with palaces upon their graves, monasteries, ports and churches. Glory be to Allāh before Allāh. Glory be to Allāh after Allāh.'

¹⁵ Also meant for exclamation.

¹⁶ The Arabic words for being hopeful and being like an elephant have the same spelling.

His servant brought him a young bird, he said, 'Look at this young bird, how much it resembles its mother!' Then he said, 'Is its mother male or female?'

He got sick once, so he was asked, 'How are you feeling?' He said, 'The whole world is feverish.'

Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad Al-Tirmidhī said, 'I was at the glassmaker's¹⁷ house, consoling him for the loss of his mother, and there was a number of leaders and writers, when Ibn Al-Jassās arrived. He entered while laughing and said, "Praise is due to Allāh; I am really pleased, O Abū Ishāq.' The glass maker and the attendants were surprised, and he was asked, 'How do you find something pleasing when it grieves him and grieves us?' He said, 'Woe to you, I had heard that he was the one who died, and then when I learned that she was the one to die, I was pleased.' Everybody then laughed.

Ibn Al-Jassās wrote to his agent to carry a hundred weight measures of cotton, and he did, but after he ginned it, only a quarter of the total weight remained. So he wrote to the agent, 'This cotton only yielded twenty-five weight measures. In the future, only cultivate ginned cotton and some wool also.'

He went to a garden one-day and he ate Picris¹⁸, which inflamed him, so he asked the gardener for some onion to quell the bitterness, but he did not have any. He told him, 'Why don't you plant some for us?'

¹⁷ Referring to Abū Ishāq, a scholar of Arabic linguistics who used to be a glassmaker in his younger years.

¹⁸ A plant from the sunflower family

He was once praying behind the Imām, and the Imām said,

وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ﴿٧﴾

“or of those who are astray.”

[*al-Fātiḥah* (1) 7]

Ibn Al-Jassās said, ‘Yes, I swear.’

He used to supplicate and say, ‘Allāh is sufficient for me alone.’

He said once, ‘A rat used to live in the ceiling and annoy us, so one person prescribed a certain medicine for me. Since then, I heard no dose from them,’ when he meant to say ‘sound’.

He described three kinds of clothes and said, ‘If I wear one of those I care not for the others.’

He said one day, ‘The air was cold yesterday, but I could not find it.’

He was once presented with ground ostrich meat, and he liked it and said, ‘What if I ate it with a village?’ when he meant to say ‘soup’.

When he got sick, he was asked, ‘Perhaps you ate something bad?’ He said, ‘No, I swear. I only ate fake young chicken.’

A man was mentioned to him and he said, ‘His mother told me that he begot his father when he was eighty years old.’

One day, he was presented with a Branco de chumbo¹⁹, he said to those around him, ‘Eat, for this is the Mother of Cities.’

He said once, ‘I went to the toilet yesterday and the lantern was

out, so I looked around with my tongue until I found the toilet seat.’

He went to visit a sick person, who complained to him of his shoulders. He said, ‘I swear, I do not sleep from the pain of these shoulders of mine, and he hit his knees with his hands.’

However, it was narrated that Ibn Al-Jassās used to pretend, and that this was not his true nature. So it is important to note this.

‘Alī Ibn Abū’l-‘Alī Al-Tanukhī conveys from his father that he said, ‘In Baghdad in the year 356H, I met with Abū ‘Alī Ibn Abū ‘Abdullāh Ibn Al-Jassās, and I found him a kind sociable old man. I asked him about the stories associated with his father, such as saying “Yes, I swear” behind the Imām instead of ‘Amīn’; saying that he wanted to kiss the minister’s head, when he was asked, ‘Does it have gold in it,’ he said, ‘Even if it had feces in it, I would kiss it’; and describing a Mushaf that was very ancient as ‘Khosrowian’²⁰. He said, ‘I swear that all these and their likes are lies. He was not a simpleton to do all that, and he was [not] amongst the most cunning of people. But he used to spread, in the presence of ministers, similar stories out of the kindness of his heart, and because he wanted to depict himself, in their view, as a fool so that the ministers felt no danger from him, since he was meeting privately with Caliphs frequently.’

‘I will convey something that he told us, which will indicate to you how very serious he was. He told me, ‘When Abū’l Ḥasan Ibn

¹⁹ A type of pigment powder paste

²⁰ Related to Khosrow, the King of the Sasanian Empire.

Al-Furāt was appointed as the minister, he had malice towards me, so he sent agents to my estates, ordered to block my transactions, and started to badmouth me in his council. I entered upon him one day, and as I was leaving, I heard his doorkeeper say, 'Can there be such a treasury walking on the face of the earth with no one to collect it?' I thought, 'Surely that must be the talk of his master, and that I am going to be pillaged.' During that time, I had seven million tangible dinars, jewels and other wealth. I spent the night thinking of what to do with him, and then a thought came to me in the last third of the night, so I rode to his house immediately and found the gates closed, so I knocked on them. The gatekeepers asked, 'Who is this?' I said, 'Ibn Al-Jassās.' They said, 'This is not the time for visits; the minister is asleep.' I said, 'Tell the doorkeepers that I came for an important matter.' They informed them and one of them came out to me and said, 'He will wake up in a while.' I said, 'It is too important to wait. Wake him up and tell him of me.' He went inside for a while, then got out and brought me into the house until I reached his bedroom, he was sitting on his bed and surrounded by about fifty servants and housemen, as if they were guards. He was terrified, thinking that a serious matter has occurred and that I am bringing the message of the Caliph, this is what he was expecting I would be bringing.

He stood up and greeted me then said, 'What brought you at this hour? Did something happen or do you have a message from the Caliph?' I said, 'Do not worry, nothing happened nor do I have a message from the Caliph. I only came for a matter that concerns me and concerns the minister, which can only be discussed in private.' He calmed down and told those around him to leave, so they did. He said, 'Bring it.' I said, 'O Minister, you have displayed the most malice intentions about me and sought to destroy me and abolish my wealth. In that abolishment is the outing of my soul,

and for the soul there is no compensation. I swear I have done nothing wrong in your service other than try to rectify any wrong I saw, and I have strived to reform you with all my power, but you have insisted to bring me harm. Nothing in this life is weaker than a cat. However, if it is spotted by the grocer in his shop, caught and cornered, it will jump on him and scratch his face and body, tear his clothes, and cling to life with all its might. I have found myself in that situation with you, yet I am not any weaker than the cat. I have made this a clear warning; accept my resolution or I will bring you down with me.” And I made the strongest vows, “to head for the Caliph at this hour, transfer from my treasury to him two million dinar and to make sure they reach him before morning arrives, which you know I am capable of. I would tell him to take that money, and deliver Ibn Al-Furāt to such-and-such and appoint him as a minister instead, then give him the name of whom I think should be appointed, who has a adequate outlook, pleasant talk and good writing. I will only choose from among your scribes, for the Caliph will not see the difference between you when he sees the money to be present, and he will receive you immediately. The newly appointed will see me as someone who took him from a lower state, made him a minister and spent all that money on him, and he will serve me and seek my council. I will deliver you to him to torture you until he takes the whole two million dinars; you know you have that much wealth, but you will be penniless afterwards; and the money will return to me without any loss on my part. I will have destroyed my enemy, quenched my hatred and regained my money; my wealth will be safe, and my status will rise for removing a minister and appointing another.’

When he heard this, regret overcame him and he said, ‘O enemy of Allāh, would you consider that to be permissible?’ I said, ‘I am not the enemy of Allāh. The enemy of Allāh is he who

thought it permissible to do what compelled me to this thought at an hour like this. Why wouldn't I regard permissible to bring ordeal to he who wanted my destruction and the abolishment of my wealth?' He said, 'So what is the alternative?' I said, 'You vow at this hour with the strongest vows not to go against me in any matter - whether small or big, and not to reduce my dues, alter my transaction, conspire against me or refer to me poorly - whether in an apparent or a hidden fashion.

He said, 'Would you also vow to display good intention and proper obedience and support?' I said, 'I will.' He said, 'Allāh curse you, for you are the devil. By Allāh, you have bewitched me.' He asked for an inkwell and we composed a vow, so I made him swear to it first, then I swore to it. When I wished to leave he said, 'O Abū 'Abdullāh, you have risen in my sight and relieved me of a burden. By Allāh, Al-Muqtadir²¹ would not have differentiated my efficiency from that of my lowest scribes in the presence of that money. Let what happen between us remain hidden.' I said, 'Glory be to Allāh!' He said, 'Come to the council tomorrow to see how I treat you.' I got up, he said, 'Servants! All of you be with Abū 'Abdullāh.' Around two hundred servants went out with me and I returned to my house.

When the morning arrived and I had some rest, I came to his council. He introduced me to those who were present, he told them of what had happened of absolute carelessness, treated me in a way witnessed by the attendees, and instructed to send orders to his agents in the districts, to honour me. My agents, officials, and to maintain my wealth and estates. I praised Allāh and got up, he said, 'Servants! Be with him,' and the doorkeepers accompanied me holding their swords, while people were in astonishment. Nobody

²¹ The then Abbasid Caliph.

knew the reason for that, for I never told the story until after he was imprisoned.' Abū 'Alī then asked me, 'Can the person who did that be the same person about whom these stories are told?' I said, 'No.'

Al-Tanukhī conveyed that Ibn Al-Jassās properties were seized during Al-Muqtadir's reign, the seized properties increased, and around six million dinar remained for him.

Al-Tanukhi said, conveying from Qāḍī Abū 'Amr that Ibn Al-Jassās and his idiocy were mentioned in front of him and he said, 'Allāh forbid, he is nothing like what is said about him. I had visited him a few days ago, and in his inner courtyard, there was a set-up pavilion, so we sat talking by it. Then we heard the squeaking of a shoe from behind the pavilion, so he said, "Servant! Bring me the person wearing that shoe.' A black slave girl was brought to us, and he said, 'What were you doing here?' She said, 'I came to tell the servant that I'd finished cooking, and ask permission to bring it.' He said, 'Go about your business.' At that point, I knew that he wanted to inform me that walking in such a specific way is of a vulgar slave girl, and that she is not of his women. Can that person be from the foolish?

Al-Tanukhī also narrates from Abū'l-Qāsim Al-Juhanī that he said, 'I was at Ibn Al-Furāt's council while Ibn Al-Jassās was present, and people talked about the things they leave for their descendants. Ibn Al-Furāt asked, 'What is the most valuable thing a man can leave for his descendants?' Some said 'land and properties', others said 'real estate', others said 'monetary wealth' and other said, 'Light valuable jewelry. For the Umayyads were asked: Which kind of wealth was most useful for you in your calamity? They said: 'Light valuable jewelry; we used to sell it without being required to identify themselves, and each one is lighter than its price.' All

while Ibn Al-Jassās remained silent, so Ibn Al-Furāt asked him, 'What do you say, O Abū 'Abdullāh?' He said, 'The most valuable thing people leave for their descendants are estates and brethren; if they leave them estates, properties or wealth without brethren, it will all be lost and annihilated.'

He continued, 'I will tell the minister of a story that happened long ago, which will support my statement.' Abū'l-Furāt said, 'What is it?' I said, 'People know that Abū'l-Ḥasan was a man famous for collecting jewelry for himself and to leave it for his sons and daughters. I was sitting at home one day, and my doorkeeper came to me and said, 'A women is asking permission to come in.' I allowed her in, and she asked me to empty the council for her, which I did, then she said, 'I am such-and-such, the widow of Abū'l-Ḥasan.' I recognised her and felt pain by the state in which she was in, so I called upon my servants to bring me something to change that state. She said, 'Do not call upon anyone; I am not in need, and this is not why I came to you; I need you for something more important.' I said, 'What is it?' She said, 'You know that Abū'l-Ḥasan only left us jewels. When the incidents happened and we scattered and our situation changed, I had jewels that he had given me and granted it to me and to our daughter, such-and-such, which is here with me. I feared if I appeared in Egypt that it would be taken from me, so I prepared for travel and left in disguise with my daughter, but Allāh protected us until we reached this country with all our wealth. I got some of the jewels worth five thousand dinar, I took it to the market and received an offer of two thousand dinars, so I agreed to this price. When they brought the money, they asked, 'Who is the owner of these jewels?' I said I was. They said, 'You are not in a position to have such wealth, you must be a thief'. They held on to me to take me to the police, and I feared to be arrested and recognised, so the jewels would be confiscated

and I asked for payment. Therefore, I bribed the people with some dinars that I had, left the jewels with them and came. I could not sleep - distressed by what had happened and fearing poverty for that was my only way to wealth, and now I am rich yet so poor. I did not know what to do, then I remembered what was between us and you, so I came. What I need from you is your influence to get back what was taken from me, sell the rest, get my money and buy my daughter and myself some estate from which we can profit.'

I said, 'Who took the jewels from you?' She said, 'Such-and-such.' I went to him, and spoke with him privately and said, 'This is a woman from my household, I had sent her with the jewels to assess their price, so that I am not seen selling something without knowing its value. So why did you interfere with her?' They said, 'We did not know, and our policy, as you know, is that we do not buy something without knowing the identity of the owner. When we asked her about the owner, she was confused, so we feared that she was a thief.' I told him, 'I want the jewels right now.' I took them from him and dismissed him. The woman stayed at my house, and I strived to sell the jewels for her for as a high price as I could. She got more than five thousand dinārs for it, and she bought estates and a residence where she lives with her children up until now. Therefore, I saw that when jewels were with her without a (trustworthy) friend, they were just stones; they were even a cause for harm. But when she found a friend to help her, she received this great sum of money for it. Therefore, a friend is better than the inheritance.' Abū'l-Furāt said, 'Well said, O Abū 'Abdullāh.'

CHAPTER TWELVE

Women associated with Idiocy and Foolishness

AS FOR WOMEN associated with idiocy (*taghfiḥ*), then there are many stories.²²

They include the story of a woman who undid her spun thread: Muqāṭil Ibn Sulaymān said, ‘She is a woman from Quraysh called Raytah bint ‘Amr Ibn Ka‘b, who whenever she span her thread would untwist and unspin it.’ Ibn al-Sā‘ib said that her name was ‘Raytah’, while Abū Bakr al-Anbārī said, “Her name is Ratyah bint ‘Amr al-Mariyah and she was nicknamed ‘Al-Ja‘rā’. She was from Makkah, and she was known for her unparalleled antics. She was extremely foolish, spins threads of cotton or wool until she strengthens it, and then asks her servant to undo it. Some said that she used to spin threads with her slave girls, and then order them to undo what they span.

²² [Publishers Note]: This is by no way degrading of women as all stories that were mentioned so far included men and idiocy and foolishness is not specific to any gender or race in particular.

They include the story of a Daghah bint Mughnaj: Mughanaj is Rabi'a Ibn 'Ajl, and her Mu'āwiyah with Daghah being a nickname. She got married at a young age in Al-Anbar clan, and got pregnant. When the pains of childbirth came to her, she thought she was defecating, so she asked the co-wife of her husband, 'Does the feces open its mouth?' She said, 'Yes, and calls for its father.' And the co-wife took the child. Banu al-Anbar clan are called 'Al-Ju'r (the feces)' clan because of this incident.

She saw the fontanel (soft spot) of her child being irritated, so she cut it with a knife and got part of his brain out saying, 'I got this substance out of his head so that his pain stops.'

It is said that she had beautiful front teeth, then when she had a child, his father was kissing him and saying, 'Who has nice tooth sockets?' Then she thought that he liked that in him, so she broke her teeth, and when he said, 'Who has nice tooth sockets?' she said, 'O man, we all have sockets.' He said, 'You have baffled me with threaded teeth, so what will you do to me with sockets!' Thereafter, Daghah was used as a parable for her foolishness.

They also include the story of Raytah bint 'Āmir Ibn Numayr: She used to mark the heads of her children, by shaving parts of it and leaving other parts, in order to identify them from the children of other people.

They also include the story of a woman whose dowry was one of her anklets: Muḥammad Ibn 'Abdu'l-Mālik told us, conveying from Ibn Khalaf that it is said, 'more foolish than the woman whose dowry was one of her (own) anklets', who is a woman from Fazārah Clan.

They also include the story of Hadbanah: We have already explained the debate over the name, and we stated that one of the views is that it is the name of a woman that used to blow her nose with her wrist bones.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Stories of Some Intelligent People who Committed Acts of Foolishness, Insisted on it and Believed it to be Appropriate, which made them Among Fools and Idiots

The first and the elite among them is Iblis (Satan): For he was a worshipper and a leader for the angels (*malā'ika*), but he displayed foolishness (*hamq*) and idiocy (*ghafla*) above all other idiots (*mughfal*). When he saw Adam (*'alayhi as-salām*) being created from clay, he thought to himself, 'If I was preferred to him, I will destroy him, and if he was preferred to me, I will disobey him.' Had he pondered, he would have known that Adam was already chosen, and that he could not overcome that with a trick or act of foolishness. Yet he was ignorant of fate (*jahl al-qadr*) and forgetful of his own position. Had he even stopped here, it would have been limited to envy (*hasd*), but he went beyond that to challenge the Creator that His decision was not wise (*hikmah*), by saying,

قَالَ أَرَأَيْتَكَ هَذَا الَّذِي كَرَّمْت عَلَيَّ

“Do You see this one whom You have honoured above me?”

[*al-Isrā'* (17): 62]

Meaning why did you honour him, then he claimed to be better (*afḍal*) than Adam (*'alaybi as-salām*) by saying,

خَلَقَنِي مِنْ نَّارٍ وَخَلَقْتَهُ مِنْ طِينٍ ﴿١٢﴾

“You created me from fire and created him from clay.”

[*al-A'rāf* (7): 12]

His words imply, ‘I am wiser than the Most Wise (*al-Hakīm*), and more knowledgeable than the All-Knowing (*al-'Alīm*), and that His preferring of Adam was not correct.’ He was aware that his knowledge (*'ilm*) was obtained from the Greatest Knower (*al-'ālam al-akbar*), so he implied, ‘O You who taught me, I am more knowledgeable than You. O You who decided to honour this man above me, you were wrong.’ Then, when his arguments failed him, he was satisfied to destroy himself and tightened the noose of his stubbornness. He then strived to destroy others beside himself and said,

لَأَعْوِيْنَهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ ﴿٨٢﴾

“I will surely mislead them.”

[*Sad* (38): 82]

His ignorance (*jahl*) in that statement is evident for two reasons:

Firstly: He said that with the aim of affecting the One punishing him. Unaware that Allāh is the Truth and He is not affected, harmed nor does He benefit by anything, for He is the Self-Sufficient.

Secondly: He forgot that he is unable to mislead those whom Allāh wishes to protect, then he remembered and said,

إِلَّا عِبَادَكَ مِنْهُمْ الْمُخْلِصِينَ

“Except Your chosen servants among them.”

[*al-Hijr* (15) 40]

So if his actions are ineffective, and his misleading does not impact those guided by Allāh, then his knowledge has gone to waste. Then due to his weak resolve, he was satisfied with a short period (of respite), which he knew would pass quickly - when he said,

أَنْظِرْنِي إِلَى يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ

“Grant me reprieve until the Day they are resurrected.”

[*al-A'raf* (7): 14]

Making the sinner commit sins became he gains pleasure out of it, as if he is trying to enrage [Allāh] thinking ignorantly that He would be affected. He forgot the soon approaching eternal punishment, so there is neither idiocy nor ignorance like his. How wonderful is the saying:

I wonder at *Iblis* in his arrogance
and the malice of intent he displayed
He was too proud against Adam to bow down
and became a pander for his offspring

Another among them is Abū'l-Husayn al-Rāwindī: I never saw someone else top *Iblis* in madness (*janūn*) and idiocy like Abū'l-Husayn al-Rāwindī. He had published books where he degrades the Prophets (*'alayhum as-salām*) and insults them. He then penned

a book in response to the Noble Qur'ān, accusing it of containing linguistic errors, which none of the enemies of the Qur'ān dared accuse or was able to prove - but he allegedly did what the eloquent could not.

Then he wrote his book '*Al-Dāmigh*', but I deem myself above mentioning some of what he did of attempts to oppose the Creator (*al-Khāliq*), in His Exaltedness, and describing Him with the lowest descriptions with which a human can be described.

For example, he claimed that from Allāh comes injustice (*ẓulm*) and evil (*sharr*), in a far uglier phrasing, some of which I have mentioned in the past. It is astonishing how they argue against the Creator after proving Him. The non-Muslim has found rest (in his works). Could Allāh have granted these people perfect intellects (*'aql kāmila*), while He himself is imperfect (*naqs*) in His Attributes (*Ṣifāt*)?

Exalted is Allāh, far above the idiocy (*taghfīl*) of those people.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Stories of Other People who Committed Acts of Foolishness and Idiocy

Among them is the story of Qābil (Cain): Iblis was followed in idiocy and foolishness by Qābil. It is a great idiocy to say to he whose sacrifice was accepted,

لَأَقْتُلَنَّكَ

“I will surely kill you.”

[*al-Mā'idab* (5): 27],

which is really foolish because if he had been wise, he would have looked at why his brother's sacrifice was accepted and his was not. It is further idiocy to carry his brother's body on his back and not being guided to bury him.

Among them is the story of those who said, 'burn him and support your gods.' Other instances of idiocy are evident from people who spoke these words, as Mentioned by Allāh in the Qur'ān:

حَرِّقُوهُ وَأَنْصُرُوا إِلَهَتَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُنْعَلِمِينَ ﴿٦٨﴾

“Burn him and support your gods - if you are to act.”

[*al-Anbiya'* (21): 68],

and

إِنْ أَمْسُوا وَاصْبِرُوا عَلَىٰ إِلَهِكُمْ

“Continue, and be patient over [the defense of] your Gods.”

[*Sad* (38): 6]

Among them is the story of Nimrod: The king who disputed with Ibrāhīm (*'alayhi as-salām*) was King Nimrod who spoke these words, as Mentioned by Allāh in the Qur'ān,

أَنَا أُحْيِي وَأَمِيتُ

“I give life and cause death.”

[*al-Baqarah* (2): 258]

Among them is the story of Pharaoh: [There is no greater foolishness than that of Pharaoh of Egypt],

أَلَيْسَ لِي مُلْكُ مِصْرَ وَهَذِهِ الْأَنْهَارُ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِي أَفَلَا تُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٥١﴾

“Does not the kingdom of Egypt belong to me, and these rivers flowing beneath me?”

[*al-Zukhruf* (43): 51]

He boasted of a water body, which he did not cause to run nor does he know its source or drainage. He also forgot to mention other similar bodies that are not under his rule. There is no folly

greater than Pharaoh's claim to be a deity. The wise people gave an example for that and said, 'Iblis entered upon Pharaoh who said, 'Who are you?' He said, 'Iblis.' He said, 'What brought you?' He said, 'I came to look at you and wonder at your madness.' He said, 'How so?' Iblis said, 'I have opposed a creature like me and refused to bow down to him, and in return I was expelled and cursed. You, on the other hand, claim to be the deity. That is, by Allāh, cold madness.'

Among the astonishing forms of idiocy is worship of idols: For the deity is supposed to make, not be made. Moreover, it is idiocy from Nimrod to build the tower and then throw an arrow to allegedly kill the deity of Heavens. Had his opponent seen a bow aiming towards him, could he not have thrown himself off its path?!

Among the forms of idiocy is what was manifested by the brothers of Yūsuf ('alayhi as-salām) when they said,

فَأَكَلَهُ الذِّئْبُ

“a wolf ate him.”

[Yūsuf (12): 17]

without tearing his shirt. As well as their story with Yūsuf ('alayhi as-salām) when he said, 'The beaker is telling me such and such.'

It is also asininity for Hārūt and Mārūt²³ to claim insusceptibility to sin and the power to overcome fate. Therefore, when they descended from heaven with that intention, they were brought

²³ The two angels that were sent to Babylon to teach magic to its people, as a trial for them. Their story was mentioned in *Al-Baqarab*.

down.

Among the forms of idiocy are those of Bani Isrā'il: Another sign of stranger idiocy is when the Children of Israel said to [Prophet] Mūsā ('*alayhi as-salām*) after he had crossed the sea with them,

أَجْعَلْ لَنَا إِلَهًا

“make for us a God.”

[*al-A'raf* (7) 138],

and the Christian's claim that [Prophet] 'Isā ('*alayhi as-salām*) is a God (*ilah*) or a Son of God. They claim divinity for a human being that had no existence before he was born, and who could not remain alive except by eating food.²⁴

The Divine is one whom all things depend on, not the other way around. They believe him to be the son of Allāh, and filiations imply being part and or equal to Allāh, both of which are impossible when speaking about Allāh. In addition to that, when they claimed that he was killed and crucified, they accuse him of helplessness and inability to defend himself, all of which are signs of delusional idiocy.

*Another form of idiocy is the belief (it'iqād) of the Mushabihah:*²⁵ Who say that the deity (*ma'būd*) has parts and organs (like humans), and that He resembles His creation, when they know that the created is in need and dependant a Creator.

²⁴ Like any normal human being.

²⁵ *Mushabihah* (or *Mujassimah*): Those who declare that Allāh is like His creation and that the Attributes of Allāh are like the attributes of the creation. This was first propagated by Maqātil ibn Sulaymān al-Khurāsānī, during the era of the tābi'in.

*Another form of idiocy is the belief al-Rāfiḍah:*²⁶ Who are know of 'Alī's (*radīy Allāhu 'anhū*) acceptance of the pledges of allegiance (*bay'ah*) to Abū Bakr (*radīy Allāhu 'anhū*) and 'Umar (*radīy Allāhu 'anhū*), begetting children from *Al-Ḥanasiyah* when she was of the captives during Abū Bakr's reign, and marrying his daughter Umm Kulthum to 'Umar Ibn Al-Khaṭṭāb (*radīy Allāhu 'anhū*). All of this proves his acceptance of their rule. Then these Rāfiḍah, some of whom charge Abū Bakr (*radīy Allāhu 'anhū*) and 'Umar (*radīy Allāhu 'anhū*) with blasphemy and insult them, trying to prove with that, their love and support of 'Alī, when in reality they far from their claim and have really left it behind.

If you follow the likes of the aforementioned, you will find they are many, but we have included them briefly to stimulate thinking in that regard, and we chose not to go into detail, since the larger purpose of this book is different.²⁷

It is narrated that Aḥmad Ibn Hanbal said, 'If a man came to me and said, 'I have made an oath of divorce not to talk to a fool that day', then he spoke to a Rāfiḍī or a Christian - I would say, 'He did break his oath.' So, Al-Daynūrī said, 'Allāh bless you, why did they become fools?' He replied, 'Because they went against the sayings of those they (claim to have) believed. As for the first,

²⁶ Al-Rāfiḍah: Also well-known as the Shī'ah, who call themselves the *Ithnā Ash'ariyyah* (The Twelvers) of Ja'faris. This sect was founded by 'Abdullāh ibn Saba', a Jew, who appeared in the time of the *Khilāfah* of 'Uthmān. He claimed love for 'Alī and *Ahl ul-Bayt* (the family of the Prophet ﷺ). They curse the Companions declare them disbelievers, in particular Abū Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthmān and the wives of the Prophet ﷺ. They also believe the Qur'ān to be incomplete.

²⁷ The author discusses them in detail in his book *'The Devil's Deceptions'* published by Dār us-Sunnah Publisher, Birmingham, U.K., 1st ed. 2014.

{[Prophet] 'Isā ('*alaybi as-salām*) said to the Christians,

أَنْعَبُدُوا اللَّهَ

“Worship Allāh.”

[*al-Mā'idah* (5): 117]

and said,

إِنِّي عَبْدُ اللَّهِ

“Indeed, I am the servant of Allāh.”

[*Maryam* (19): 30],

but they said, ‘No. He is not a servant, but he is Allāh.’

As for 'Alī (*radīy>Allāhu 'anhu*), he narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ) said about Abū Bakr (*radīy>Allāhu 'anhu*) and 'Umar (*radīy>Allāhu 'anhu*), “These two are the masters of the elder people among the inhabitants of Paradise.” Yet the Rāfiḍah insult them and renounce them.

Another form of idiocy and foolishness are stories of idiocy of old: Besides, among the most astonishing stories of idiocy of old, is what Jābir Ibn 'Abdullāh (*radīy>Allāhu 'anhumā*) narrated, ‘A man worshipped Allāh in a monastery. It rained and grass grew in the land, then he saw a donkey eating grass, so he said, ‘O Allāh, if you had a donkey I would have herded it (to eat) with my donkey.’ When news of this reached one of the Prophets of the Children of Israel, he wanted to pray against him, but Allāh the Almighty revealed to him, ‘I only take account of people in accordance with their intellect.’

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Acts that Resemble Idiocy

MANY SANE PEOPLE COMMITTED acts that resemble idiocy, but they did not mean it, so it was conveyed as humorous stories of foolishness. For example, it was narrated from a poet that he said, 'I went to a prince to recite poetry to him, and one of the ministers was mentioned, so I spoke something of virtues and generosity to encourage the prince to follow in his footsteps, then I recited:

Those who seek *Kafour* turn away from others
and whoever sought the sea must take the small river [as a route]²⁸

He said, 'May Allāh curse you. What example is that?' So I realised and swore that I did not mean him.' Something similar happened to 'Abdullāh Ibn Ḥasan, when he was accompanying Abū'l-'Abbās

²⁸ This line is from a poem for Al-Mutanabbī that starts with:

*What a great illness, that for which death is the healer;
and what a great calamity, that which makes you wish for death.*

al-Şaffah²⁹, and looking at his city that he built in Al-Anbar City, and he recited:

Did you not see that Mālik spent his day building
houses that benefitted Buqayla Clan
He wished to live as long as Noah
When Allāh's command³⁰ comes every night

Abū'l-Abbās got angry, and the poet apologised to him. Moreover, while 'Isā Ibn Mūsā was walking along Abū Muslim the day he entered upon al-Mansour, he said:

It will come to you that which annihilated the earlier generations
And what fell upon 'Ād and Jurhum

Abū Muslim said, 'Is this in exchange for the safety I granted you?' 'Isā said, 'May I be stripped of all that what I own if that was my intention.' When al-Amin³¹ was surrounded, he told his slave girl to sing, so she sang:

Kulayb, I swear, had more supporters
and was richer than you, was imbrued in his blood

These words were stressful and caused him to have grief, so he said, 'Sing something else,' so she sang:

²⁹ The first Abbasid Caliph.

³⁰ Referring to death.

³¹ The sixth Abbasid Caliph.

My eyes complained of their absence, which made them sleepless
Awaiting loved ones causes crying

He said, "May Allāh curse you! Do you not know something else?" Then she sang:

The night and day do not alternate
and the stars do not rotate in the sky
Except to transfer power from a king
that went under the dust, to another

He then said, 'Get out.' So she stood, stumbled at a crystal cup and broke it. Someone then said,

قُضِيَ الْأَمْرُ الَّذِي فِيهِ تَسْتَفْتِيَانِ ﴿٤١﴾

"The matter about which you both inquire has been decreed."

[*Yūṣuf* (12): 41]

Al-Mā'mūn³² entered upon Zubayda to console her of the death of al-Amin. She said, 'Why don't you keep me company and have lunch with me today?' so he did, and she called for one of al-Amin's slave girls to sing, and she sang:

They killed him to take his place
just as Khosrow's governors did to him

He jumped angrily, and Zubayda said, 'O Amir Al-Mu'minin.

³² The seventh Abbasid Caliph.

May Allāh deprive me of his reward if I knew what she was going to say or told her to say.' He believed her.

When Al-Mu'tasim³³ finished building his palace, people entered upon him, and Ishāq Ibn Ibrāhim asked for permission to sing poetry. So he sang of the palace and the council beginning with:

O house, deterioration has changed you
By Allāh, what has befallen you?

Al-Mu'tasim regarded it as an ill omen, and people wondered at Ishāq, why he said such in spite of his intelligence. They left and the palace was abandoned, and was not frequented by anyone afterwards.

Al-Sahib Ibn Abbad sang to 'Adud Al-Dawla³⁴ a poem of tribute, saying:

I came to Taghlib clan, as I was lost
for Taghlib prevails, as long as the day and night

'Adud Al-Dawla considered the word 'prevails' a bad omen and said, 'We seek refuge in Allāh.' And Al-Sahib realised what he said, and his face changed colour.

Ishāq al-Muhallabī said, 'I entered upon Al-Wathiq³⁵ who told

³³ The eighth Abbasid Caliph.

³⁴ An emir of the Buyid dynasty. He ruled an empire stretching from Zaranj as far to Yemen and the shores of the Mediterranean Sea.

³⁵ The ninth Abbasid Caliph.

me, 'Sing to me something of Arabic.' So, I said:

O house, if deterioration has erased you
I would like to see you

Hatred was evident in his face, which made me regret what I said.

Abū'l-Najm al-Ajli entered upon Hisham Ibn 'Abdu'l-Mālik, and sang a poem until he reached a verse that talked about the sun and said, "It is in the horizon like the eye of a cockeyed person." Then, Hisham ordered his head to be struck, and he was driven out.

Arta'āh entered upon 'Abdu'l-Mālik Ibn Marwān, and he was an old man, so 'Abdu'l-Mālik asked him to recite something of what he wrote during his long life, and so he sang:

I saw the person consumed by days
as the ground consume the fallen iron pieces
Death does not leave, when it comes,
in the person's soul anything behind
Be aware that it will continue fighting
until it fulfills its promise by taking Abū'l-Wālid's life.

'Abdu'l-Mālik, whose cognomen was Abū'l-Walid, felt scared and thought that Arta'āh meant him, and Arta'āh realised his mistake and said, "O Amir Al-Mu'minin, I am also known as Abū'l-Walid," and the attendees concurred to that.

Dhu'l-Rimmah entered upon 'Abdu'l-Mālik and sang:

Why are the tears falling from your eye
as if flowing from torn kidneys?

It also happened that 'Abdu'l-Mālik's eyes were flowing, so he thought he was indirectly referencing him, so he got angry, cut him off and drove him out.

A poet entered upon Tāḥir Ibn 'Abdullāh and sang:

The camels caught fire from 'Azīzah
that she lit, and how can one visit you?

While Tāḥir mother's name was 'Azīzah, so the attendees exchanged derisive glances, until he realised his mistake, and stopped talking.

A man entered upon 'Uqbah Ibn Muslim Al-Azdī and sang:

O daughter of Al-Azdī, my heart is distressful,
infatuated with you, and refuses to return.
They have blamed me, and I said leave me
whom you are blaming me about is my lover

'Uqbah's face changed, and when the poet noticed that, he stopped.

The governor, Abū'l-'Alī Al-'Alawī entered upon another governor one day. While they were chatting, a servant of that man came and said, "Sir, on which horse should we put the saddle today?" He said, "The 'Alawī one." Abū Alī told him, "Choose your words wisely, sir." He was embarrassed and said, "It was a slip."

Al-Murtada Abū'l-Qāsim, chief of the 'Alawīs,³⁶ passed by on a Friday by the door of Al-Mansour Masjid in the place where sheep are sold. He heard the appraiser yelling, 'We sell this 'Alawī male-goat for a dinār.' He thought the appraiser was referring to him and was distressed by that, but when he investigated he found that a male-goat that has two pap's on its neck is called 'Alawī' because of the two strands of hair that were hanging down on Al-'Alawī's neck.

Something similar happened to Abū'l-Faraj Al-'Alawī, who was lame and cock-eyed, so he heard an appraiser yelling about a male-goat, "How much would like to pay for this lame cock-eyed male-goat?" and he had no doubt that the appraiser was referring to him. Therefore, he went and beat him up until he discovered that the male-goat was lame and cockeyed, and all who were present laughed.

Abū'l-Ḥasan Al-Sabī said, 'A friend of mine went to visit a man who had recently bought a house near his. He greeted him, was friendly with him and said, "This house belonged to our friend and brother, but you, praise Allāh, are more generous and clement than him, so praise is due to Allāh who have replaced him with a better person.'" Then he sang:

³⁶ People who are the descendants of 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib - may Allāh be pleased with him.

SKETCHES OF FOOLS AND SIMPLETONS

The falcon was replaced by a piebald crow

The man burst into laughter until he fell down and felt embarrassed, and it became a funny story that he was crazy about.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The Idiots among Commanders and Governors

MUḤAMMAD IBN ZIYĀD SAID that 'Isa Ibn Ṣāliḥ was foolish, and he had a son called 'Abdullāh. When 'Isa was appointed as the military leader of Qinnasrin,³⁷ he appointed his son to take his role. His son said, 'My father's messenger came to me at night, asking me to come at an early time, which is usually reserved for urgent matters, so I thought that a letter came from the Caliph in some matters that required the presence of other people including myself. I dressed up in black, led the delegation and rode to his house. When I entered, I asked the doorkeepers whether a letter had arrived from the Caliph or whether something had happened, but they said, 'No. Nothing like that has happened.' When I reached a place beyond the doorkeeper's presence, I asked the servants as well, and their answer was the same as the doorkeeper's. When I reached the location where my father was, I found him on his bed, and he said, 'Son, I have stayed up all night thinking of a matter.' I said, 'Allāh

³⁷ A town in northern Syria.

bless the Amir, what is it?’ He said, ‘I desire that Allāh makes me into one of the Houris,³⁸ and make my husband in Paradise Yusuf, the Prophet. I thought for a long while then said, ‘Allāh bless the Amir, Allāh Almighty has made you a man. Therefore, I hope that He lets you enter Paradise and marries you to Houris.

Al-Madā’inī told us, ‘A noble man came to Baghdad and wanted to send a letter to his father to inform him of his news, but he did not find anybody he knew. He then took the book to his father himself and said, ‘I didn’t want you to be in the dark about my news, and didn’t find anyone to deliver the letter, so I brought it myself,’ and he handed it to him.’

Ibn Khalaf said, ‘Two men had a dispute and went to the governor, but he could not judge between them fairly with justice, so he punished both of them and said, ‘Praise be to Allāh that I did not miss the wrongful between them.’

Sa’id Ibn Ja’far al-Anbarī told me, conveying from his father, ‘Abū’l-Khaytham got angry with one of his officials, then someone spoke to him about forgiving the official, and he said, ‘No, by Allāh, until I hear that he kissed my feet.’

Abū ‘Uthmān al-Jāhiz said, Farāzah was in charge of grievances in Basrah, and he had the longest beard and the least intellect amongst mankind. He is the one about whom the poet said:

It is a grievance that you would be
in charge of grievances, O Farāzah

The barber cut his hair one day, and when he was done, he asked

³⁸ The female companions of believers in Paradise.

for a mirror. He looked in the mirror and said to the barber, 'As for my hair, I permitted you to cut it, but you, O son of a sly woman, have moved on to my moustache,' and he then covered it with his hand.

Farāzah heard yelling one morning, so he asked, 'What is all that yelling?' They told him, 'Some people are arguing about the Qur'ān.' He said, 'O Allāh, give us a rest from the Qur'ān.'

An owner of a partridge passed by him so he asked, 'How much do you sell this partridge for?' He said, 'Each for a dirham.' He said, 'No.' The man said, 'That is my price.' He said, 'I will take two for three dirhams.' He said, 'Take it.' Farāzah said to his servant, 'Give him three dirhams for the price of two for this is better for the buyer.'

We learned that al-Muhallab appointed a Bedouin in Kurah³⁹ and removed its previous leader. He got on the pulpit, praised Allāh and glorified him, and then said, 'O people, set your sights on what Allāh has ordered you. He has made the Hereafter desirable for you and this worldly life undesirable, but you desired the latter and abstained from the former. However, you are close to missing out on this life and attaining nothing in the Hereafter, and you will be as Allāh Almighty said, 'You neither kept the water, nor did you relieve yourself from the heat.'⁴⁰ Take warning from the deluded who was removed from you; he strived and collected but all that came to me in spite of him, and he became like Allāh Almighty said:

³⁹ District in Khurasan

⁴⁰ This is not the saying of Allāh; rather this is a Arab proverb.

Does Umm Khalid buy?

Perhaps the walking endeavors for the sitting.⁴¹

Then he got off the Minbar.

We learned that Yazid Ibn al-Muhallab appointed a Bedouin in Kurah. On Friday, he got on the pulpit and said, 'All praise is due to Allāh,' then he could not think of what to say next, so he said, 'O people, beware of this worldly life, for you will not find it except as Allāh the Almighty has said:

This world will not last for anyone
and no one will last in this world.

His scribe then said, 'Allāh bless the Amir, that is poetry.' He said, 'Will this world last for anyone?' The man said, 'No.' He then asked, 'Will anyone last in this world?' The scribe said, 'No.' He said, 'Then, what is your problem?'⁴²

We learned that a Bedouin gave a sermon and said, 'Allāh has created the heavens and the earth in six months.' Someone told him, 'In six days.' He said, 'I swear I wanted to say it, but I felt it is too little.'

Abū Bakr al-Naqāsh told us that the scribe of Manṣūr Ibn al-Nu'mān wrote to him from Baṣrah that he had caught a thief, but did not wish to cut his hand without investigating his matter - and he learned that he is a tailor. So Manṣur wrote back, 'Cut his foot and leave his hand.' He replied, 'But Allāh ordered us differently.'

⁴¹ Meaning it's the same thing.

⁴² It did not occur to him that this is not a verse from the Qur'ān.

So he wrote, 'Do what I told you, for the present sees what the absent does not.'

A slave trader came to Maṣṣūr with a mule and said, "I will sell this for forty dinār." So he said, 'You will not overcharge me this time, (turning to his servant, he said) give him one thousand five hundred dinārs.'

Maṣṣūr entered upon Aḥmad Abū Ḥātim while he was having **lunch** and eating cow heads, so Aḥmad said, 'Join us O Abū Sahl these are young cow heads.' He said, 'Bon appetite [enjoy your meal]. May Allāh feed you and me from the heads of people of Paradise.'

Al-Mā'mūn told him, 'O Maṣṣūr, the Tigris River has become flooded, so give us your opinion.' He said, 'Hire a hundred water carriers to take the excess water and water the streets with it.' Al-Mā'mūn told him, 'I don't know what to do with you.'

Muḥammad Ibn Khalaf told us that a governor told his scribe, 'Write to such-and-such, reproach him and tell him, 'Wretched is what you did, you piece of stool.' The writer said, 'Allāh bless you; that is not appropriate (word) for correspondence.' He said, 'You are right. (Write instead), lick the stool's opening with your tongue.'

The ruler Abū Bakr Ibn Badr said, 'Some men gathered around Al-Husayn Ibn Makhlad one day and demanded money from him. He said, 'I have money at home, which I will bring. However, I am to the Sultan like marble; if something is poured on top, you collect it from my bottom. If you are patient until the money is returned, I will distribute it on to you, otherwise the decision is yours.'

Abū 'Alī Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥasan, the scribe, told us, 'I used to write for Abū'l-Faḍl Ibn 'Allān while he was in Arjān⁴³ when he was told, 'Abū'l Mundhir al-Nu'mān Ibn 'Abdullāh came wanting Persia, and you should meet him tomorrow.' Ibn Al-Faḍl used to have quartan fever, so he said, 'How can I work while tomorrow is my day of fever, so I will not be able to meet the man! I should have the fever now in order to be able meet him tomorrow. Boy, get me the medication so that I get the fever right now.'

Al-Madā'inī told us, 'Abdullāh Ibn Abī Thawr was the governor of Madinah. He gave a sermon and said, 'O people, fear Allāh and seek repentance, for He destroyed the people of Sālih for a she-camel worth five hundred dirhams.' So, they used to call him the she-camel's appraiser, and al-Zubayr removed him from his position.'

Sulaymān Ibn Ḥasan Ibn Mukhlid told us that his father, along with at Shujā' Ibn al-Qāsim⁴⁴ and some people with grievances entered to talk to him about their matters; so he said, 'Now is not the time for that. The Amir sits to consider these matters the day before yesterday. Come to him then.'

Shujā' entered upon al-Musta'in⁴⁵ once and the edge of his robe was torn, so he asked him about it and he answered, "I was walking on the road and I passed by a dog. I stepped on its robe, so it tore my tail." Al-Musta'in could not help but laugh.

⁴³ A historical city near Shiraz

⁴⁴ The scribe of the Abbasid Caliph, Al-Musta'in.

⁴⁵ The twelfth Abbasid Caliph.

Jarir Ibn al-Muqaffa' conveyed from Khusrā's minister that he said, 'Kavādh⁴⁶ was a fool; he used to go to the orchard and smell Basil in their soil bed and say, "I do not pluck them out of mercy.'

We heard about Naṣr Ibn Muqbil - who was Harūn al-Rashid's appointed official on al-Raqqah that he ordered to flog a goat according to the Ḥudūd. They said, 'It is an animal.' He said, 'Ḥudūd cannot be suspended, and if I did then what a wretched governor I would be!' News of this reached al-Rashid, so he called for him. When he stood before him he said, 'Who are you?' He said, 'I am of slave-origin and I belong to the Banu Kilāb clan.' Al-Rashid laughed and asked, 'What is your philosophy in ruling?' He said, 'People and animals are equal to me. If an animal was even wronged by my mother or my sister, I would punish her according to the Ḥudūd, without fearing the blame of critics.' Therefore, al-Rashid instructed that he should be relieved.

A wise Indian man congregated with his minister, and the minister was feeble. He asked the wise man, 'What is the greatest science?' He said, 'Medicine.' He said, 'I am quite knowledgeable in medicine (too).' The wise man said, 'What then is the treatment for one who has pleurisy, O minister?' He said, 'His treatment is to die until the fever of his chest reduces.' He said, 'Who then revives him after death?' He said, 'That is another science found in the Book of Stars (i.e. Astrology), but I only read therein the chapter of life because the book states that life is better for a man than death.' The wise man said, 'O minister, in any case, death is better for the ignorant than life.'

Abū Khandaf observed his livestock, and found one that was

⁴⁶ Sassanid king of Persia

scrawny and skinny. He said, 'Bring me the cook', after which he knocked him to the ground, then he flogged him fifty times and said, 'Why is that animal in such a state?' He said, 'Sir, I am the cook, I know nothing about the state of livestock.' He said, 'By Allāh you are the cook! Why did you not tell me? Leave now, and when tomorrow comes, I will flog the cow herder sixty times - twenty more - so do not grieve.'

Abū'l-Ḥasan Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥilāl al-Sābī narrated, 'Some people of the Daylamites⁴⁷ went to herd their cattle and caught the thief known as '*Al-Irāqī*'. They dragged him to the minister, Abū Muḥammad al-Muhallabī, and he ordered to recall Abū'l Ḥusayn Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad al-Qazwīnī, the scribe who worked for the police in Baghdād. Al-Muhallabī told him, 'This is the impulsive Irāqī thief, whom you were unable to catch; take him and write your letter that you received him.'

He said, 'Right away O minister. But you say three, and he is one, so how can I write that I received three?' He said, 'Hey you, these three are descriptions of the same person.' Then the writer wrote, 'I, Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad al-Qazwīnī, have received from the Minister the impulsive Irāqī thief; three but they are one man.' He wrote his letter in history. The minister laughed, and al-Nasrānī thereby said, 'al-Qazwīnī has rectified your doctrine in receiving that thief.'

A writer once said to a female singer, 'Write this sound to me.' She said, 'You are the writer.' He said, 'You can write it with its melody, but I cannot write it with its melody.'

Abū'l-Ḥasan Ibn al-Ḥilāl al-Sābī said, 'Some travelling merchants

⁴⁷ A Persian people inhabiting the regions on the southern shore of the Caspian Sea.

gave the minister Abū'l Faraj Muḥammad Ibn Ja'far three pieces of silk, and they remained with him for a while. Then, their owner came and asked for them. The minister opened the inkwell and wrote, in a bold font, on one of them, 'This is not viable', on the other, 'This is satisfactory' and on the third, 'This is expensive'. Then he said, 'Give them to their owner', who took them after they were spoiled.'

Abū'l-Ḥasan also said, 'If a horse made a mistake while he - the minister - was riding it, he would order withholding its fodder in discipline. But when he was asked to reconsider, he would say, 'Alright feed it then, but do not let it know that I know that.'"

A Christian came to 'Abdullāh Ibn Bashār - who was the governor of Madīnah - and said, 'I want to shake your hand.' 'Abdullāh said, 'You son of such-and-such. Did you not find anyone lesser than me in the army of Amir Al-Mu'minīn? Did you come wanting to throw words between Jesus the son of Mary and me until the Day of Judgment?'

One governor got on the pulpit (*minbar*) and said, 'If you honour me, I shall honour you. But if you dishonour me, it will be lesser for me than this fart of mine,' he then proceeded to emit wind by farting.

A foolish ruler once passed by an ice merchant and said, 'Show me what you have.' He broke a piece of it and handed it to him, the ruler told him, 'I want it colder than this.' He broke a piece from the other side. The ruler asked, 'How much is this?' He said, 'A pound for a dirham, and of the other piece, a pound and a half for a dirham.' He said, 'Give me from the latter kind.'

He once passed by some mud in Bāb Al-Sham Street, so he said

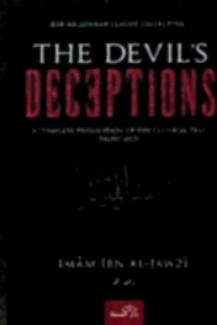
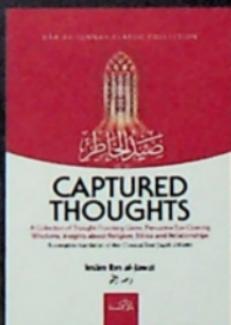
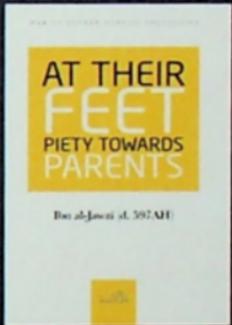
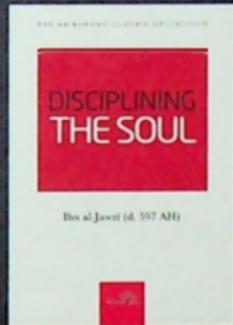
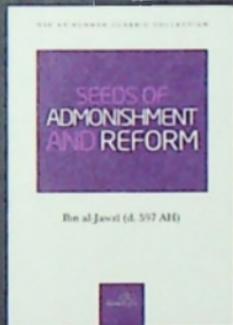
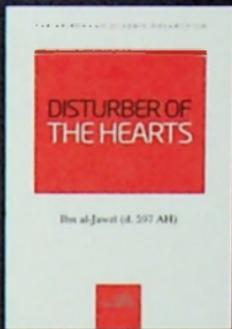
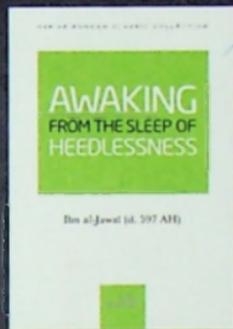
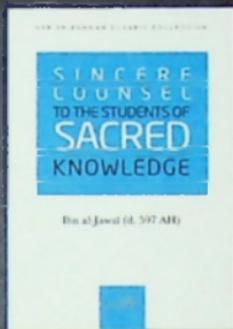
to his companions, 'The Sultan wants to ride, so if I came back and find it like this, I will set fire to it, and no intercession would help you.' Qubaysah, who was the appointee of his father on Khurasān, gave a sermon, during which received a letter, so he said, 'This is the letter from the Amir, and by Allāh, he is worthy to be obeyed, and he is my father and older than me.'

Abū Ishāq Al-Sābī narrated, 'One of the most famous non-Arab writers, known as Abū'l-'Abbās Ibn Darastoyah, attended the council of Abū'l-Faraj Muḥammad Ibn Al-'Abbās while he was taking consolation for his father, after written news of his death arrived from Ahvaz. Gathered around Abū'l-Faḍl were state officials; he had been appointed on the Divan in his father's place. Then, when Ibn Darastoyah settled in, he pretended to cry, and said, 'Perhaps this news is false rumors.' Abū'l-Faraj said, 'Many written letters of news have arrived.' He said, 'Forget that, did you receive a letter that is handwritten by him?' He said, 'If such letter had arrived, we would not have been sitting here,' and people laughed. 'Abdullāh Ibn Fadhlawya, the governor of Qarmisin, sang in his council, which was full of people, these poetical verses:

For The Day of Judgment there is no cure
except art, play and music

One of the attendees replied, 'That is the day of cupping.' He said, 'Forgive me, for I am poor in grammar.'

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دار السنّة

Sketches of Fools and Simpletons

Imām Ibn al-Jawzī

Lack of sense leads to acts of foolishness, allowing them to mothball into comical gags. Ibrahim Al-Nazzam was once asked, "What are the limits of foolishness?" To which he replied, "You asked about that which has no limits."

The art of humour is an intricate balancing act between folly and good judgement, measure and discomposure. People of virtue have always enjoyed a chuckle and hearty anecdotes, remaining positive towards them because they relax the mind and comfort the heart from fatigue of contemplative thought. Even the joshing nature of the Prophet (ﷺ) is well-known, yet it was guided by a higher code of conduct cognizant of personal and public responsibility.

Purposeful joking and jest brings benefit just as salt in food, ever careful not to be excessive. Before you therefore, is an amusing classical text reflecting a sharp departure from the usual scholarship for which the author is known for. Compiled in the sixth century Hijri, this collection of irreverent and playful sketches - derisive and cynical observations of mischievous people - are sure to tickle your funny bone, albeit having a more sober purpose for the reader to contemplate.

Imām Ibn Al-Jawzī compiled a book called 'Al-Adhkiya', in which he reported entertaining stories of smart and intelligent people that would serve as model examples; for indeed stories of brave men teach bravery. He then saw it appropriate to collect stories of foolish people and simpletons too with the intent to deliver three main purposes, namely: Mentioning examples of the foolish entices a knowledgeable person to avoid the means of ignorance, ensuring it doesn't become an acquired attribute; To appreciate what Allāh has granted us of intellect and nobility, increasing our gratitude to Him; and as a means of recreation for the hearts, for it's important to allow some entertainment as they tire just as bodies tire.

This abridged English rendering of 'Akhbar al-Hamqa wal-Mughaffalin' is sure to lead you to constant laughter and smiles.



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