

## Kafur, The Magnificent Black Genius

(Continued from Page Three)

This is a subtle allusion to Kafur's color and his merit, which is represented as the most noble object on earth. For the worthlessness of other



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men in comparison. Muttanabi designates them as the white and the corners of the eye in which parts the sense of sight does not exist. He also delicately hints that Kafur's color is superior to that of the white.

But if Al-Muttanabi was shrewd, Kafur was shrewder. A master of men he easily saw through the poet, and delayed the fulfillment of his promises. At last, Muttanabi, weary of waiting, sent Kafur the following lines, thus revealing himself in his true light:

"Who could teach noble sentiments to this castrated Negro? his white masters or his ancestors who were hunted like wild beasts; or his ears bleeding under the hands of the coppersmiths; or the price set upon his head when none would give two oboles to purchase him?"

"But so it is! The best of the whites are incapable of honor or noble deed. How, then, can any be expected of a black eunuch?"

"A Negro whose lip is half as large as himself and whom they style the moon of darkness. When I praised that hippopotamus . . . it was not so much to praise him as to satirize the human race."

Before that had reached Kafur, Muttanabi had taken care to get out of Egypt.

Kafur, when reproached for not having kept his word, replied:

"My good people, I saw the liberty he took in his verses and his haughty spirit. Would he who claimed the

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gift of prophecy after Mohamet not be capable claiming a share in the empire with Kafur? This reflection should suffice."

Kafur died in 967 A.D., after a rule of 22 years, noted to this day for its magnanimity, mildness, and justice. He was buried in the Lesser Karafa Cemetery, where, says Ibn Khallikan: "his tomb is a well-known object," and he adds, "Public prayers were offered up for him as a sovereign from all the pulpits of Mecca, Hedjaz, Egypt, and the cities of Syria, including Damascus, Aleppo, Antioch, Tarsus, and Al Mississia." His death was the signal for a great revolt not only in Egypt but in the Mohammedan empire.

Kafur is an important figure in the East in that he paved the way for a whole dynasty of slave kings, many of whom were black, known as the Mameluks, and who ruled until defeated by Napoleon.

Another famous eunuch who was virtual ruler of the Mohammedan empire and was immensely wealthy was named Barjewan. Of him we shall write another time.

"The following incident will throw some light on the nobility of Kafur's character," says Biographie Universelle. "A Greek (Fatik the Great, already mentioned), formerly his companion in slavery and his rival for the favor of his master, and whose pride would not permit him to bow before Kafur had left the court with much noise. But the care of his health brought him back in spite of

himself. Kafur could easily have got rid of a rival whose talents and whose hatred had caused him much harm, but he preferred to regain his friendships by good deeds.

"What is more astonishing, Kafur

wished that the praises of this old favorite of his master should be celebrated not only while alive but beyond the tomb by the famous poet Al-Muttanabi."

THE END



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