JĀḤIẒ “ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ENMITY AND ENVY”

Valuable as C. Pellat’s “Life and Works of Jāḥiẓ” (English version, 1969) is, it hardly gives a fully rounded picture of the author’s work. The method of presenting a series of short extracts, chosen for their special interest to the Western reader, certainly shows the astonishingly wide range of the author, but does not display the structure of each individual work, with both its highlights and its lower-key passages. The short epistle here translated is in some ways complementary to my attempt at a rendering of the “Epistle on Singing-girls”, Risālāt al-Qiyan (published in 1980); the latter has a decidedly informal style, whereas the “Enmity and Envy” is in the conventional high style of belle-lettres of the period. This causes severe problems in translation, because the parallelistic style abounds in near-synonyms, and although each part of a binomial expression in the Arabic contributes to the total sense, it is often almost impossible to reproduce this satisfactorily in English; I have not hesitated therefore occasionally to condense such expressions somewhat. On the other hand, the formal style has the result that the text can be regarded as much better established than that of the “Singing-girls”; apart from a few cases discussed in the notes, I have followed the edition by ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn (Rasaʾil al-Jāḥiẓ, Cairo 1964). References are given to the foliation of the manuscript, entered in the margins of that text. The transliteration system I have used for Arabic quotations is basically that of the Wehr-Cowan dictionary; but in the case of Arabic names incorporated into the English text, a looser system of a type often employed by historians.

Fi Faṣli ma Bayna l-ʿAdāwati wa-l-Hasad

In the name of God the Compassionate the Merciful. May God cause your lifetime to be accompanied by happiness and security, conjoined with health and joy, united to unceasing prosperity and unremitting dignity.

Here is a splendid, excellent book, in which the difference is traced between enmity and envy. In this I have no forerunner, nor in my book on “the Virtue of Promise” which was written earlier than this one, nor that on “the Manners of Viziers” which preceded “the Virtue of Promise”. The special excellence of these books, in which they surpass others, is the way they are adapted to the good taste of the noble, by including
delightful and unusual stories, fine and subtle tales, and anecdotes which encourage the hearer to praiseworthy manners and exemplary deeds, of which the memory will endure; as well as containing accounts of princes and caliphs, their viziers and followers, and what happened to them. I beg you,¹ by your conspicuous honour and the purity of your virtue, to do me the favour of turning your attention to reading those books. But if you cannot peruse them exhaustively all through, because of the amount of work that falls on you, it will be enough for you to become apprised of their outlines and acquaint yourself with the topics of their various sections by glancing through the headings; for you have such a penetrating and lively mind that a quick glance will suffice.

Throughout all past centuries, there has never been an age devoid of accurate scholars, who have read the works of their predecessors, studied them along with fellow-students of those books, collaborating with persons who agree but having also to deal with opponents. Thus they extracted the cream of wisdom and tested its pillars, comprehending the rules of the various disciplines, learning basics and principles and becoming acquainted with the applications thereof; they could distinguish between things similar and things parallel; they recognised the affinities existing in things of one form or category, and linked up related and contiguous phenomena; they made deductions about what is obscure and hidden, from what is clear and evident; they mastered deep problems by means of open and well-known facts. Thus they came to have the reputation of keen understanding and pure scholarship, and were adjudged to have innate [121r] cleverness. They wrote books on all subjects, scientific or literary, for the benefit of their contemporaries and generations to come. Further, they gained the ear of persons capable of bestowing favour on them, by means of that superiority of knowledge which God had implanted in them, by which He had distinguished them, and made them superior to, others; in which superiority also they competed with their opponents and vied among themselves.

But they had jealous rivals among their contemporaries, persons who falsely arrogated to themselves the qualities of real scholars, and labelled themselves by empty titles, claiming the name of scholarship by a figure of speech without any reality in it, clothing themselves in a garment of deceit and making unfounded and unprofitable boasts.² These people took the real scholars as a model in their dress and demeanour, and im-

¹ J. has here extended to the verb saʾala the construction which in earlier Arabic was confined to the expression našadtu ilāḥa lammā (or illā) faʾalīa “I adjure you by God to do it”.
² “making unfounded ... boasts”: Harūn’s footnote cites a hadīt where tašabbuʿ means “to boast falsely”, though the common meaning of the stem is “to gorge oneself on”.