CREOLE FOLK-LORE FROM JAMAICA.  

II.

NANCY STORIES.

The nursery story of Jamaica is a “Nancy story.” A “Nancy” is properly a large spider, but the word has come to mean the familiar genius of the field, the wood, or the house, like the Puck of English legendary lore; the sprite, malicious or kindly, who plays pranks or wisely directs the affairs of men or animals. Nancy stories usually end in a proverb or moral.

1. The Yalla' Snake.

This tale is not without its relation to modern society, being applied to the flirt, male or female, who flits from flower to flower, and after all takes up with a “crooked stick.”

A young damsel was warned by a friend as follows:—

Him, da Yalla' Snake. You dis like wha' de Nancy 'tory say 'bout Yalla' Snake. Him hea' 'bout a gal, ebery young man come court her, she say, ‘no!’ Desha one too tall, tarra one too short, nedda one too little, tarra one too poor, tarra one too ugly. She couldn’ please. Tell Yalla' Snake borrow horse and chaise, borrow coat, borrow trousers, borrow ebery ting, den go court her. Yalla' Snake charm her to dat rate dat she married to him. When dem was gwine home, eberybody met dem tek away dem tings, horse, chaise, clo’s, ebery ting till nodin’ lef’, an’ she see say dat she married to yaller snake. Da so you will go. You go ya, you court disha, you drop him, you court, court, till you gone pick up Yalla’ Snake, now wait.

2. Why Cats hate Rats.

The following Nancy story professes to account for the enmity of cats to rats, and also puts in a claim for the use of cats as food, on the ground that “puss hab fowl meat in him”:—

Once in de befo’ time, Puss was a great man, and used to wear shoe and 'tockin’, an’ boot an’ 'pur, an’ ride hoss like a dem buckra; den one time a Nancy mek a dinna’, an’ him hax eberybody fe’ come dere an’ eat dinna’, and him hax Puss too, an’ Puss go. Dem eat de dinna’; but it 'pear like a Nancy didn’ gib dem nuff fe’ eat; but him boil him one fowl, a big Mullay (Malay) hen fe’ him fe’ eat when de people gone. Puss neber eat fowl meat, an’ as him walk pass de cubbud him smell de boil’ fowl; den him say, “My gums, what am a sweet ting!” Him tek him foot, 'crape, 'crape de cubbud door

1 See page 58, No. XXXII., January to March, 1896.
till him open it; den him see de fowl; den him tas’ lilly; as him
tas’ it so, an’ tas’ how it sweet, him bruck (broke, seized the fowl
and fled). Ratta des da go fe’ tas’ a lilly, when him see Puss run
wid de whole fowl. When Ratta see dat, him bex. As a Nancy
come, so him miss de fowl; as him miss it, so him bawl out, him ask
dis one, “You know whoora tek my fowl?” Him say him no know.
Him hax tarra one, caranampo (silence). Him hax noder one, cara-
nampo, till Ratta come up, den tell him say da Puss tek it. A Nancy
was mad bex. Him hax wha’ side Puss gone? Dem tell him, him
bruck a’ter Puss. Puss dis put down de fowl fe’ go eat it, but as
him see a Nancy, da come him tek up de fowl fe’ go swallow it, but
him couldn’ swallow it; it fasten in him troat. When a Nancy
come, him hol’ Puss; him say, “Puss, gib me my fowl!” Puss say:
“Mew!” him ’quezee Puss, Puss say “Mew!” Puss did hab’ a good
voice befo’, but de fowl’crape him troat, and ’poil him voice, and from
dat time him cry “Mew, mew!” till now. When a Nancy coudn’
get him fowl, him was dat bex dat him hol’ Puss an’ begin to beat
him. He beat him, beat him, till he tink him dead, den he lef’ him
dere. But Puss didn’ dead; he lie down till de whole o’ de fowl melt
away in him ’kin; den him get up. All de time him lie down dere,
as people pass dem laugh a’ter him; dem say, “Wo-o, look ’pon Puss
de tief!” Dat is de reason you see Puss always hol’ down him head,
an’ run fas’, fas’, when him see any body; an’ dat is de reason too
dat any way Puss see Ratta, him kill him fe’ sake o’ dat ’tory him
tell a Nancy, say da him tek him fowl.

3. The Mudfish and the Watchman.

Once ’pon a time in a chookoo (far country) dere was har’ time
dere. Nobody couldn’ get noding to eat. Bud (birds) dem fly all
about da, look fe’ someting to eat, but dem couldn’ get notin’. So
’tay (until) one day, de wor’ (word) come say one gen’leman corn
piece far yonda’; hab plenty corn, an’ de corn well an’ ripe. As de
news come so, pigeon dem all da fly fe’ go dere. Mudfish in a wata’;
So ’tay in a breakfas’ time (until breakfast time), him yery (hear)
bud wing da go ya-pa-pa-pa (imitation of the flight of pigeons). Him
say: “Po’ me, boy, da worra disya to-day!” (Alas for me, the worry
this day!) Him swim go da sho’ side, den when pigeon dem ‘top da
riba’ side fe’ drink wata’, him hax dem, say: “Bra, da which side
riber da go?” Dem say: “Ha, Bra! Buckra corn piece ripe,”
say, “we go dere!” Mudfish say: “Bra, u-noo carry me go wid
u-noo, no?” Pigeon dem say: “Cho, mudfish! ’tay where you da
tan’ (stand) man! Wh’ you da go do da corn piece?” Mudfish
wouln’ satisfy. Him ‘tan’ den da sho’ side, so pigeon dem come da
wata’side, come drink wata’, him beg dem: “Bra, unoo carry me go,

Yerry groomer corn pempensy,
Groomer yerry,
Pigeon bring me da groomer yerry.

Watchman dance. Him say: "Mudfish, you sing well, sa'!" Mudfish say: "Put me in a tub o' wata', and I wi' sing betta', Bra!" Watchman put him in a big washin' tub o' wata', Mudfish sing again. Watchman dance so, till sweat drop off da him face, him say: "Mudfish, you sing too sweet." Mudfish say: "Dis put me da riber side, mek I smell riba' wata'." Him say: "No, Mudfish! bambyge you mek me out fool!" Mudfish say: "No, Bra, no 'cazion put my body, dis put my tail, mek it touch de wata', an' I will sing fe' you, mek you dance like you mad." Watchman say: "I will do it, but tek care you na mek me fool." Him say: "No, Bra Watchman, put me down." Mudfish begin sing, Watchman begin dance. So Mud-
fish da sing, so him da wriggle him tail. How de sing sweet! Watchman him neba' look 'pon Mudfish. Mudfish wriggle an' sing, till him get into de wata'; as him get in dere so, him raise up him head an' say: "Bra Watchman, me gone, yerry!" Watchman jump afta' him, but befo' you coulda say "Jack!" Mudfish gone. A dat mek you hear dem say: "Neba' mek Mudfish tail touch wata'."

The proverb is equivalent to the English "Give an inch, take an ell." The words of the song of the mudfish are not intelligible, though they may originally have had some significance.

4. The Origin of Woman.

A discussion arose between black Lizzie and her husband upon the origin of man. Harry laid it down for an axiom that he was made from the dust of the earth, because the minister said so. "I mek out o' dust fe' sartin." To him, according to the story, Lizzie replies: "Me no mek out o' none dirt." Then Harry: "Ef you don' mek out o' dirt, wha' you mek out o'? You mek out o' dirt, yes!" "I don't mek out o' notin' o' de kin'," "Den wha' you mek out o'? You mus' mek out o' some goolin' (golden) ting or noder, den?" "I don' mek out o' no goolin' ting, an' I don' mek out o' none dirt. I mek out o' bone." "Mek out o' wha'?" "Bone!" "Bone?" "Yes, bone to be sho'." "Wha' kin' o' bone?" "Rib's bone! you na hea' minista' say so?" "Well, I don' know wha' fe' say 'bout dat; I don' like fe' say dat wha' minista' say not de trut'; but I mean fe' say, when minista' read 'bout dat rib's bone, him must mean buckra ooman, becasin so dem white, so de bone white. Ef you mek de same, you' 'kin would a ben white." "Cho," said Lizzie, "ef you ben open you' ears, 'tidda da sleep, you would a hea' de minsta' say de 'kin notin', but de blood, da de ting, becasin in de book say, dat white-o, brown-o, black-o, all mek de same blood; you eba' see white blood an' black blood?" "Look you," said Harry, "you know how me uncle Jame use fe' to say ooman came in dis worl'?" "Cho, no boda' me." "Neba' min', I da go tell you. Dem mek two men; de fuss one mek berry well, but when dem mek de oder one, it kinda' 'poil. Den as dem look upon it, so it da jump about, and shake him head, and do all kin' o' 'tupid ting, like a how ooman hab fe' go on. Den one o' dem hol' him, say, 'Wha' kin' o' ting you?' Den de oder say: 'Cho, him no use, him can' talk.' Ebery day him da go on like a dummy, till one day dem hol' him so, 'zaman him tongue, den dem see de tongue tie; dem tek a raza', cut it. As dem cut it so, bam! de ting mout begin da fly, dem coud n' 'top it. Dem say: 'Well, dem sorry dey eber cut de tongue.' From dat time, it mek you hear dem say: 'Ef you wan' ooman fe' good, gib him 'tump o' tongue'" (stump of tongue, a tongue-tie).
Mr. Murray, the "brown man" mentioned in the previous article, is responsible for this story, which at all events has the characteristics of negro humor.

The Creole's Lament.

To the same informant belong the following verses, which, although perhaps semi-literary, indicate the vein of poetic sentiment to be found beneath the heavy layers of superstition and ignorance with which the Creole blacks of the West Indies are incrusted; though, as a rule, endless refrains and meaningless jingles are the siftings which may well weary the miner in native verse. The lyric is said to be founded on real life. Sarah Miller was a black woman, whose misfortune it was to be supplanted in the affections of her lover by a younger rival. She became demented, and continued to sing the song, which had been put together when her loss was recent.

As to the expression, buddy is a term of endearment of uncertain origin. Massnega is a fellow-servant, male or female; in this case the term is applied to the rival, also compared to a green leaf. "Ackie" (akra, Hibiscus esculentus) is a beautiful fruit, with a thick rind of deep crimson, which bursts as the fruit ripens, and shows three oblong sections, of milky-white color, imbedded in velvety compartments, and surmounted by oval seeds of a brilliant jet, called in the song the eyes of the fruit; these, when the fruit is ripened, fall to the ground and are worthless. The beauty of the simile will be appreciated by those familiar with the fruit.

Oh! What do my buddy, O!
Oh! What do my buddy, O!
All da coax, me da coax,
My buddy won' 'peak a wor';
All da beg, me da beg,
My buddy won' 'peak to me, O!

Massnega look 'pon my buddy, O!
Massnega look 'pon my buddy, O!
My buddy bex', my buddy bex',
My buddy won' 'peak a wor';
Me kiss him foot, buddy foot,
Buddy won' 'peak to me, O!

Dey ripe leaf dey 'pon tree top, O!
Dey dry leaf da tree root, O!
Young leaf green, young leaf green,
Young leaf won' green no mo';
It will drop from tree top,
Come down on groun' to me, O!

Ackee wear him green flock, O!
Ackee hab him black eye, O!
De red frock burn, red frock burn,
Black eye will drop da groun';
It will drop from tree top,
Come down a groun' like me, O!

Oh, what do me buddy, O?
Oh, wha's matta' wi' me buddy, O!
Buddy bex', buddy bex',
Po' me gal, po' me, O!
Do wha' me do, buddy bex',
Buddy won' 'peak to me, O!
Da since he go to leewar', come back,
Buddy won' 'peak to me, O!

*William C. Bates.*

*Note.*—A certain number of Anansi stories were printed by Sir G. W. Dasent, in the appendix of his “Popular Tales from the Norse.”

In 1890 Miss Mary Pamela Milne-Home produced a small volume entitled “Mamma’s Black Nurse Stories” (W. Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh and London). Together with fourteen new tales, the collector reprinted those of Dasent. As the book of Miss Milne-Home is not familiarly known in America, we take the liberty of making a citation from her preface.

“In the West Indies, if you desire to be told a fairy tale or anything of the kind, you must ask for Anansi stories. . . . Anansi stories, which are those generally told children, owe their name to a mysterious personage who plays a principal part in most of them—a hairy old man with long nails, very ugly, called Brother or Father A-nansi. Although this word is sometimes spelled Ananzi, I prefer the former spelling, as I think it shows the derivation more clearly, as I shall presently explain.

“In some ways Anansi bears a resemblance to the Scandinavian Troll or Scrattel, and the Lubber-fiend of the English north country. He is said to be undersized and hairy, and his friendship is often unlucky, his presents turning to leaves or stones. Like the Rakshas of old Decan days, and the demon subjects of the Cinghalense Devil, he is sometimes very hideous to look upon, and will go in rags when he has bags of money hidden away. His voice, also, is peculiar; he is said to speak through his nose, and his speech is very unintelligible, the reason given being that he talks so much with the beasts that at last he talks ‘same as them’; and a negro story-teller will always give Anansi’s remarks, therefore, with an odd, indescribable nasal accent. His character is not unlike that of the German Reinecke Fuchs, or the Japanese kitsune, fox; he is very thievish and cunning, and plays tricks like the jackal in the Hindoo stories,
and generally gets the better of the other animals, and of men, whom he sometimes befriends, but more often dupes and outwits. He sometimes takes the form of a spider, and there is a certain large house-spider with hairy legs and yellowish stripes which it is said to be unlucky to kill, commonly called Anansi. This word, like so many terms in use in the West Indies, comes from the west coast of Africa, where the Ashantees have a word ananse, meaning spider.

“Another West African word, nan, means to spin, and there is a somewhat similar term for a story, which is not at all unsuitable when one considers the way in which a folk-tale is spun by a native story-teller.

“Tecuma seems to be another name for Anansi. As my informant expressed it: ‘Tecuma one spider, Anansi one Tecuma. Tecuma big and foolish, Anansi smaller and more cute;’ in short, he always gets the better of Tecuma, as he does of all the other creatures. In some tales Anansi’s wife is called A-toukama, which also means spider, and it is probable Tecuma is only another form of the same.”

Miss Milne-Home remarks that while in these stories there is much evidently taken from old African traditions, the local setting and scenery essentially belong to the West Indies. She observes also the more poetic character of the tales in the French or Spanish islands as compared with the want of grace in those of the English colonies.

The themes of the tales given by Miss Milne-Home are as follows:

1. *Anansi and Alligator.* How Anansi lodges in the alligator’s house, devours the eggs in his pot, in spite of the scorpions put in as security, is discovered by the alligator’s daughter, and pursued; he succeeds in crossing the sea, and on the other side conceals himself in a tree; the alligator, unable to see Anansi, takes a vow never again to dwell in a house, but in the water.

2. *Brar Death* (Brother Death). How Anansi, who has been stealing, is pursued by Death, and escapes at the expense of his wife and children, who drop from the loft and are captured.

3. *De Lady and de Bull.* How a bull, disguised as a man, courts a young lady, who accepts him in spite of the warnings of a boy, but on the wedding day is discovered by the horn which grows from his forehead, and by the necessity he feels of running to pasture when he hears the boy sing the song to which he had been accustomed to feed.

4. *De Sneake and de King’s Darter.* How a snake, disguised as a man, and about to wed a lady, is discovered by his forked tongue, when the time had come to kiss the bride.

5. *Anansi and Tiger.* How Anansi, having declared that the
tiger was his riding-horse, is summoned to court for libel, but pretend¬
ing to be sick, persuades the tiger to carry him, and so appears as riding the latter.

6. The Sneake (snake). A version of the Yellow Snake above given.

7. De Affassia. A greedy father of a family will give no share of his yams to any of his household who do not know the correct name of the vegetable. It is discovered to be affassia.

8. Goat and Anansi. The dog and goat try to take shelter in Anansi’s house, and are pursued by the latter; the dog swims a river, and the goat, changing himself into a white stone, is flung over the stream by Anansi; when the river is dry, the goat hides himself like a walking bush, in green boughs, and escapes with the loss of part of his tail.

9. Anansi, his Wife and Tiger. The tiger, who in this story gets the better, feeds Anansi’s wife with the flesh of her husband, as if wild meat.

10. Rat and Cat. How the rat insists on stealing the cat’s food, and is punished.

11. Anansi, Tiger, and Goat. Anansi and goat escape from tiger, the goat being thrown across the river as a white stone.

12. Garshan Bull. How a boy kills a bull, and marries the king’s daughter (a confused fragment of a märchen).


14. De King and de Peafowl. How the peafowl has acquired her beautiful dress by singing before the king.

Of the stories related by Dasent, several are apparently of European origin. The following relate to Anansi: Anansi and Baboon. Anansi eats the baboon, but the pieces of the latter unite in Anansi’s stomach, and it is necessary to use artifice in order to get him out. Anansi and the Lion. Anansi gets the fish on shore, on pretence of giving them new life, puts them in a sack, tells the lion that they are the bones of his mother, who he is taking to the mountains to bury, after having kept her forty-seven years, persuades the lion to let himself be tied to a tree, beats him, and afterwards in disguise attends a feast made by the lion. Anansi and Quanqua. In this tale, Quanqua (?) outwits Anansi. The ear of corn and the twelve men. Anansi, by pretending to have been robbed, and demanding amends, changes an ear of corn into twelve men, which he gives to the king.

W. W. N.