

Dänisch-Hallesche Mission

Propagation of the Gospel in the East

Ziegenbalg, Bartholomäus
Plütschau, Heinrich

London, 1709

Letter IV. Difficulty of the Malabarian Language. The Readiness of the Malabarians in arguing. The Missionaries in Danger, on Account of the Roman-Catholics.

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LETTER IV.

*Difficulty of the Malabarian Language.
The Readiness of the Malabarians in
arguing. The Missionaries in Danger, on
Account of the Roman-Catholicks.*

HAVING given you in the foregoing Letter some Account of the *Idols* of the *Malabarians*; I shall now proceed both to their and the *Portuguese* Language; with the latter whereof, we have hitherto endeavoured to acquaint our selves, supposing it might prove a Means for the better Discharge of our Pastoral Function towards the poor Heathens. In learning the *Portuguese*, we have passed through many Difficulties, having been all along destitute, both in our Ship and in this Country, of all Manner of useful Helps to get it. Besides this, we perceived a vast Difference betwixt the vulgar *Portuguese*, spoke here by many Heathens themselves, and the Manner how it is spoke in the native Country. We thought it therefore necessary, to render the Fundamentals of this latter Dialect so familiar unto us, that we might be able afterwards, to condescend also to the more vulgar Delivery. In order to this, we had a strange Providence attending us, in getting a New-Testament in native *Portuguese*, together with a *Grammar*, compiled for the Benefit of such *Portuguese* as have a Mind to learn

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Latin. By daily reading of these two Books, and continual hearing and speaking that Tongue, we have made now such a considerable Progress in it, that we are able, pretty well to catechize the Heathens in *Portuguese*, designing also to set down in that Language a Collection of the chief Heads of the whole Scripture and Christian Doctrine, and then get them translated out of this into *Malabarick*. However, the *Malabarian* Language being involved in far more Difficulties than the *Portuguese*, we at first were at a stand, not knowing, whether it would be wisely done, to spend our time in learning it; especially since we found the *Portuguese* as yet sufficient for our Design: And as for such of the Heathens as were unacquainted therewith, we thought to manage them by the Help of our Servant, he having both Languages, and fit enough to be an Interpreter.

Besides this, we did not intend to make any longer Stay here than the *Three* Years engaged in at our Departure. But at last it fell so out, that we agreed, one of us should resolve, either to continue here constantly, or at least a considerable time longer, and so consequently employ himself to get the Language of the Country to such a Degree, as to be fit to improve it to the main Scope we are sent for hither. In order hereto we cast Lots; and the Lot falling upon Mr. *Plutschko*, he readily embraced it, and now applyeth himself entirely to the attaining of that Language. As for me, tho' I don't design to be quite without the Knowledge of this Language; spending an Hour or two every Day to that purpose: Yet the chief Bent of my Endeavours will

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some *Malabarians*; and then the genuine Pronunciation added with *Latin* Letters, and at last the Signification put to it. For Instance: *Tampiran*. Deus. *Tagappen*, Pater. *Magen*, Filius. *Arthal*, Mater. *Magdyl*, Filia. *Andawen*, Dominus. *Andatsh*, Domina. *Bottacham*, Liber. *Wattyjàn*, Ludi Magister. *Pyràmpu*, Baculus. *Athy*, Vapulare. *Watachù*, Lignum. *Welechaten*, Servus. *Atumey*, Sclavus. *Katty*, Culter. *Kattù*, Aër, &c. The greatest Difficulty lieth in the *Gutturals*; which we have not all in our Languages. Hence it is, that the Pronunciation of their Words cannot be so nicely described in *Latin*. They on t'other Hand, are not a little puzzled with the *Labials* of the *Europeans*, much less can they prick 'em down in their own Language.

It were to be wished, that the *Malabarick* Tongue was taught and learnt in *Europe*, with as great Industry as any other of the *Eastern* Languages; especially, since these Heathens are a very numerous People, and make a large Body of the *Eastern* Nation. By this Means they might, under God's Assistance, be rescued from their gross Blindness and Ignorance; if Protestant Kings and Powers would but readily join in lending a helping Hand to so glorious a Work, and furnish a competent Stock, for making the necessary Preparations towards it. At this Rate we should be enabled, to lay open in time all the Secrets of their Divinity and Philosophy, fetching them from their own Writings, enriched with Fables cunning enough, and trimm'd up with as fine poetical Fancies and Flourishes, as many of our Heathenish Authors, both in *Greek* and *Latin*. And we might perhaps find at least as solid and rational Conclusions in
their

their Writings, as in the much admired *Aristotle*, tho' not involved in so many Intricacies and hard notional Terms of *Logick*, *Rhetorick*, and *Metaphysicks*, as *Aristotle's* Trash.

I must confess, that my School-Master being a Man of Threescore and Ten Years, has often put such *Philosophical* Questions to me, as really made me believe, that in searching their Notions, one might discover things very fit to entertain the Curiosity of many a learned Head in *Europe*. I am now in search after them, and get them transcribed at no small Expence, it being very useful for our Design, to have a competent Insight into the Grounds their idolatrous Worship is raised on, and into all the other Matters relating thereto. Such a Discovery may in time prove a Means, to strike at the very Fundamentals of their Religion, and convince 'em of the Groundlessness the whole Structure of their Idolatry rests on, and at last, after the Removal of such Prejudices, clear the Way for a true and substantial Knowledge.

Truly, the *Malabarians* being a witty and sagacious People, must needs be managed with a great deal of Wisdom and Circumspection. Our School-Master argueth daily with us, and requireth good Reasons and Arguments for every thing. We hope to bring him over to Christian Knowledge; but he is confident as yet, that at one time or other, we shall all turn *Malabarians*, and in this Hope he takes all the Pains imaginable, to render things as plain and easie to us as possible.

This Day an eminent black Merchant gave us a Visit, and afforded an Occasion to many a good Discourse. The chief Stress of our Conference

ran upon the Folly of the *Malabar-Idols*, he being entirely on our Side, and addressing himself to our School-Master, told him in plain Terms, what great Reasons the *Malabarians* had, to turn to the One and only true God. Such kind of Visits and Conferences we enjoy almost every Day, having for our better Conveniency, hired a House for ourselves. The *Roman-Catholicks* are in the meantime very vigilant, to shew us some ill Trick or other, their Spies having been with us but just now; but we civilly dismissed them. May the Lord God of Hosts, whose Work we design to promote, protect us, and gather unto himself at last, a Church and peculiar People from among this wild Multitude of Heathens! Let then the Devil and his infernal Herd rage against it to its utmost; we know there is an over-ruling Power, confining him to such Boundaries, as he will not be able to transgress. We desire your hearty Prayers, together with those of all our Friends, &c.

Yours

*At Tranquebar in
the East-Indies,
Sept. 16th, 1706.*

B. Z.

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