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Propagation of the Gospel in the East

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Letter VI. Some particular Providence attends the Missionaries in converting a Malabarian Gentleman. His Notions about the Malabar-Gods, and Questions concerning the Christian Religion. They begin to ...

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LETTER VI.

Some particular Providence attends the Missionaries in converting a Malabarian Gentleman. His Notions about the Malabar-Gods, and Questions concerning the Christian Religion. They begin to get Acquaintance with King Tranjou.

YOU may perhaps remember as yet the Words I spoke once when we were still with you: *If the Lord should be pleased, to grant us the Conversion but of one Soul among the Heathens, we should think our Voyage sufficiently rewarded.* Now seeing our Desire has been answered thus far, I could not but impart these glad Tidings to the Praise of God and your own Satisfaction.

As soon as we came to an Anchor here, a pretty young Man of the *Malabarian* Race coming to our Ship, made some Inquiry about us, and asked me: whether I would not take him to be my Servant? I advising here upon with my Colleague, we both thought it to be a Providence, and so we took him. His Name is *Modaliapa*, of about Twenty Years of Age. His Mother being still alive, is descended from a good Extraction; her Grand-Father having been a Prince of this Country. His Father served here the *East-India* Company, and got a great deal of Wealth: but

42 *Of some particular Providences*

But before he died, he gave all away to the Company ; with this Request, that they one time might employ his Son in their Service, and see him well educated. He deposited also a certain Sum of Money for this Purpose. But all being come to Nothing, both his own and his Mother's Estate are fallen to decay, and this young Man brought to that pass, that he is fain to go to Service for his Livelihood.

This young *Malabarian*, after he had been with us for a matter of eight Days, and seen our Life and Conversation, became extraordinarily kind to us, insomuch that he wou'd ask in the *Portuguese* Tongue, (which he understands very well) whether he might not stay always with us, and transport himself one time or other into *Europe* ? We replied : If this was his earnest Desire, he ought then to embrace the Christian Religion, and learn our Language. He said : As for the Christian Religion, he would first be instructed in the fundamental Principles thereof, and get a competent Knowledge of our way of Worship. But as for the *High-Dutch*, he fell to it immediately, beginning now to read and to talk many things pretty well. We knew at that time but little *Portuguese*, which obliged us, in our Applications to him, to make use of Images, and to convey the Signification of things to his Mind by outward Objects and Representations. However, we employed now and then some others to inform him in several Points relating to Religion, especially in the Doctrine of the *only true God*, and his Son *Jesus Christ*, with the *Holy Spirit* : Likewise in the Doctrine of our *Misery* and *fallen Condition*, &c. This made such an Impression upon him, that he
freely

freely confessed, the way of Worship used by the *Malabarians*, was erroneous, and that of the Christians true. In all this he expressed himself with so much Ingenuity and good Sense, that I was surpris'd thereat, expecting no such thing; from a Heathen.

The 25th of July one visited us, who was thoroughly acquainted with the *Portuguese* Language. To him *Modaliapa* applying himself in a Discourse, began to talk of the Kings in *Europe*, rehearsing them all over one after another. I gave him to understand by that Friend, who also spoke *German*, that true and real Christians were *spiritual Kings*, and Inheritors of many glorious Possessions purchased by Christ. His Answer was: "He believed all this, but, said he, in this
" Dignity such had only an Interest, as had here
" constantly conversed with God, and been en-
" tirely bent upon an holy Life. He said: he
" knew also, That a King placed on his Throne,
" and a Beggar in his Rags, had all one Pedegree;
" Nay, he knew and believed, that this outward
" Life was not the true Life; but that which is
" to come, where there would be no such Distin-
" ction of Degrees, as there is now observed in
" the World betwixt Kings and Peasants, Blacks
" and Blancs." I caus'd him further to be ask-
ed, whether he believed only one God? He
replied: " There was no more but One, who
" had created him, with all other things in the
" World besides, and to this God he belonged
" as well as the *Blancs* or Christians, notwith-
" standing the Blackness of his bodily Shape,
" whereby he was distinguished from them. He
said: " This God was a Rewarder of Good, and
" a Pu-

44 *Of some particular Providences*

“ a Punisher of Evil, and that he heartily en-
 “ deavour’d to be nearer acquainted with him.
 “ All this he said, he was so fully convinced
 “ of, that no Body shou’d be able to argue him
 “ out on’t

After this he was asked again: Whether he
 did own the *Malabar*-Idols to be true Gods, and
 consequently as such to be worshipped? He an-
 swered *No*: “ Adding, a Man cou’d be no
 “ God, much less coin Gods to himself. He
 “ knew well enough, that the *Malabarians* were
 “ not in the way leading to a happy Life. He
 “ said: that very few of his Countrymen knew
 “ any thing of this. And he was shy as yet to speak
 “ to them about it, knowing they wou’d cry
 “ him down for a Liar, and do him all the
 “ Mischief they cou’d. I asked him again, what
 he believed of *Jesus Christ*, and of the Doctrine
 of *Christian Religion*? “ I am, quoth he, not fully
 “ instructed in this matter, and therefore cann’t
 “ at present give any satisfactory Account there-
 “ of; But I heartily desire, to have it ex-
 “ plain’d to me, and be taught such things, as
 “ I am as yet unacquainted with. He was asked
 again, whether after a solid Conviction of the
 Truth of Christianity, he was resolved, rather to
 renounce all that he had in the World, nay,
 suffer rather to be banish’d from all his Friends
 and Relations, upon Account of this saving
 Knowledge, than to enjoy here some transitory
 Pleasures, and afterwards be eternally lost with
 his Idolatrous Countrymen? In answer to this, he
 alledged several weighty reasons, why he cou’d
 not resolve upon that as yet, *viz.* because he de-
 sired

fired first to have a thorough Conviction of all those Principles, the Christians did believe and own to be true. He said: “ It wou’d make but a
“ great Noise among the *Malabarians*, if he
“ shou’d suffer himself to be baptized so soon,
“ and yet at the same time not to be able to give
“ any sufficient reason for his doing so. Where-
“ fore he had rather put it off, till he was able,
“ with solid Grounds to demonstrate that Truth,
“ he was initiated into.

Hereupon he gave us an Account of many wonderful Trials & Providences he had passed through. “ He told us: that his Neck, Hands and Feet had
“ formerly been all adorned with Golden Chains;
“ but that he was brought now to such a low Ebb,
“ as to be willing to serve others, he himself
“ having had heretofore a long Train of Slaves
“ attending him. However, he protested, that
“ under all these Disasters he was very easie,
“ knowing they had done him a great deal of
“ good. He said: as Man had brought nothing
“ into the World, so he cou’d take nothing
“ with him at his going out on’t, besides his
“ own Soul, and the Good he had done during
“ his stay in it. Then was related to him the
Life of *Joseph*, and the Marvellous Foot-steps of
Providence he had met with. How often he
seemed to border upon the very brink of De-
struction, but was soon after wonderfully raised
again by an over-ruling Providence. By this we
inculcated to him, that so likewise he should
entirely rely upon the Goodness of God, hence-
forth sincerely fearing him, and in a special manner
endeavouring to get intimately acquainted with
Jesus

Jesus Christ, whose Type *Joseph* was. And then no doubt, but the Lord wou'd give him Necessaries for a competent maintenance of his Body.

The 30th of *July*, I took a walk with him into the Country quite alone; and truly, I had then many a useful discourse with him. The Sun most brightly shining upon us, I asked him, among other things, whether the *Malabarians* did worship the Sun like one of their Gods? He said, they did. But as for me, said he, I own the Sun to be only a Creature of the great God. He added: "As sure as I am, that the way we are walking in, is the right way, and all other by-ways in relation to the place we are going to, are wrong; so fully I am also convinced, that all that I have heard and seen by you, is right and true, but our Heathenish Worship erroneous and utterly displeasing to God. I told him on this Occasion, that our Fore-Fathers in *Europe* had been formerly as blind Heathens as they were now; but that in Christ's time, and the succeeding Ages, they at last had been converted from their Darknes to the Holy Gospel; and that the same God even at this Day freely offer'd his Grace to the *Malabarians*, together with other Heathens, for their Conversion, willing that all might be saved. This he listen'd to with great Attention, but cou'd not forbear to say: that almost all the Christians led a more vicious Life than the *Malabarians* did themselves. I answer'd, he shou'd not suffer the Scandalous Life of Christians to divert him from that work he was call'd to; On the other hand, he shou'd mind our Life and Doctrine, improving more and more that little spark of Light, which God for the Good

Good of his Soul, had already kindled in him ; And then he wou'd soon come to know the difference between a *true* and a *false* Christian. Besides this, we had many other Discourses, too long to be inserted here : As one concerning the Great Glory which they enjoy, that heartily fear God, and have Communion with the Lord Jesus Christ, &c. At length, after a profound Conviction of these Truths, he declared : *That he was willing to live, and to die with me, desiring nothing more in this time, than what is just necessary for maintaining one's Body, provided he might but partake of what he had heard, and what he was so lively affected with.*

From that Day we spared no Labour, carefully to instruct him in the Word of God. What Discourses have happen'd betwixt us and him on this Occasion, you might perhaps read with no small Pleasure and Satisfaction ; But they wou'd afford matter for more than Twenty Sheets of Paper. He daily proposes such Questions to us, as we are astonish'd at. As for instance :

“ Whether God had not been powerful enough in
 “ himself to receive fall'n Mankind into his favour
 “ without sending his Son ? Why Christ was ob-
 “ lig'd to suffer, and to die on that Account ? How
 “ Christ was born without Sin quite alone, see-
 “ ing that the general Birth of Men was polluted
 “ with Sin ? Why there had been no Chri-
 “ stians from the Beginning of the World ?
 “ Whether God cou'd not compel Men by force
 “ into his Service ? Whether Christ cou'd not
 “ wholly destroy the Devil at once, and keep peace
 “ on Earth, in spite of all his restless Insults and
 “ Devices ? Why all the Christians were not
 saved ?

48 *Of some particular Providences*

“ saved? Why the Number of Christians was
 “ so very small? Why one Man cou’d not live
 “ as piously and religiously as another? From
 “ whence so many Sects had sprung up among
 “ the Christians? From whence the *Mahometans*
 “ had their Rise? Whether some of the Hea-
 “ thens, leading a Religious Life according to
 “ their ability, cou’d not be saved without the
 “ Knowledge of Christ? Whether the Christians
 “ in *Europe* did live as wicked Lives, as those
 “ in the *East-Indies*? Whether the other’ Chri-
 “ stians were ignorant of that, which we taught
 “ daily? Why Baptism was so necessary for en-
 “ tring into Christian Religion, since many not-
 “ withstanding their Baptism were damned? Whe-
 “ ther God loved the Blacks (after being be-
 “ come Christians) as well as the Blancks or White
 “ Nations? In what the Life and Doctrine of
 “ Christ did chiefly consist? &c.

In these and many other Questions of that Na-
 ture we have partly instructed him our selves,
 partly by the help of an Interpreter, when per-
 haps we wanted one word or other in *Portuguese*,
 to express our meaning to him. But by daily Ex-
 ercise he has now already gain’d so much of
 the *High-Dutch*, and we so much of the *Portu-
 guese*, that we can make shift to understand one
 another, he being at the same time our Interpre-
 ter to the *Malabarians*. He has studied five
 Years in the *Malabaric*-Schools, and is pretty
 well versed in their Theologie, Philosophy, Arith-
 metick, and fair Writing. But to render him
 more accomplish’d in every thing, that in time
 he may prove serviceable to us, in translating
 Books, and in performing other useful Services,
 I keep a particular School-Master for him, who
 is

is employed with him the whole Day. 'Tis true, he proves very chargeable to me; but since he shews so great an Inclination to go over into *Europe*, and offer to stay with me constantly, I think he may be as useful to his Country-People by being in *Europe*, as he possibly cou'd be here, *viz.* by keeping a settled Correspondence with them, and putting forth such Books, in the *Malabarian* Language, as treat upon true and substantial points of Christianity.

Besides him, we have two other *Malabarians*, who are willing both to serve us, and to be indoctrinated in Principles of Christianity: But the Parents of the one declare against it. And though he intends wholly to leave 'em, and to own us for his Parents; yet we hitherto have all along avoided the making any bustle or noise among the *Malabarians*, lest by an unseasonable Zeal we might dash 'em at once, and inspire 'em with an aversion, to come near us again. Last Night a Gentlewoman coming to visit us, brought a present of *Malabar*-sweet Meats, expressing withal a great Love and Kindness. Discoursing with her, we told her among other Things, that Christians had their best Gifts and Refreshments laid up for 'em in the World to come; whereupon she desired us to pray for her, that there she might be with us one Time, and take part in these exquisite Blessings of God. We entertain'd her besides with many other good Discourses, whereby she was so lively affected, that she offer'd to be our Slave, tho' she is of a Noble Pedegree.

May God bring her Soul over to the Obedience of Faith, and vouchsafe her to be one of the *First Fruits* of the Heathens! Our being settled

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here

50 *Of some particular Providences, &c.*

here is known almost over the whole Country, nor is King *Tranjon* any longer unacquainted therewith. One of his Officers paying us a Visit the 6th of *August* last, we discoursed him by the help of an Interpreter, wherewith he seem'd to be very well pleased. He asked us, whether we had not a mind to see the Country? If we had, he wou'd send us a Troop of Thirty Soldiers as a Safe-Guard, to attend us. He offer'd also to write to the King on our behalf, and make way for cultivating a good Correspondence with him.

For the rest, we find by experience, that for propagating the Gospel among the Heathens, next to the *GRACE* of *GOD* nothing is more expedient of any outward Help, than a blameless Life, and seasonable supplies of Money, for establishing all manner of good Foundations. We design to draw up a certain Scheme of Proposals about carrying on this Work, and to lay it before his Majesty the King of *Denmark*. It were to be wish'd, that all Protestant Princes in *Europe*, would join hand in hand together, for pushing on a Work tending to the Conversion of so many Millions of ignorant Souls, or at least come in by little and little, to promote so laudable Designs as these. Surely, God would undoubtedly second so noble Instruments, entirely bent upon the promoting of his Kingdom. And from this you may gather, that God has not left us quite without a Blessing in these small Steps, we have taken towards settling this Work. Remember us in your Prayers incessantly &c. I remain *Yours, &c.*

*At Tranquebar in the
East-Indies, Sept. the
1st. 1706.*

B. Z.
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