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Tagebuch von Johann Ernst Geister.

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9. I began to build again, though it went on a little slowly, there being a scarcity of materials.

10. Finding myself tolerably well advanced in the Malabar Language, I resolved to go now abroad, and converse with the Natives without doors. Therefore I visited to day all the schools in this place, enquiring after their books, way of learning and the like, telling the Schoolmasters at the same time, that if they had a mind to know the Ways, Customs and Religion of the Europeans, they might give me an opportunity of conversing with them. They gave a civil answer and shewed a Satisfaction about my knowing their Language, yet as they are poor people, and are obliged to attend the whole day at school, they seldom came to me, except I had a book to copy, or when they had a book to sell.

I chose the visiting of the Schools chiefly for that Reason, because I knew the Children would tell their Parents and Relations, what an unusual thing had happened at School and that consequently I would be sooner known amongst them.

On that same Account a few days after I went over the Fort Side, with an Intention to visit the Schools at Dewanapatnam, but found none in the usual places, because it was one of their holy days. However I went to the House of a Bramine, who amongst his Countrymen is accounted to be the greatest Scholar in the place. I discoursed with him for about a Quarter of an hour of Astronomy, Astrologie & the like, and he shewed me some of their Astronomical Draughts and figures, pretending at the same time to prognosticate the Number of my years, and other Accidents of my Life, in which however he made such blunders & downright Contradictions, that I could not help discovering them to him, upon which he put it off, to another day, when he could come to me & give me full satisfaction. I expressed my contentment about some things, he had shewn me, and told him, that I would be glad of his Company, whenever he would come to me, which he promised and visited me several times.

The finishing of all my Letters and Accounts to Europe, has required so much time, that I was in necessity to omit now and then an hour of my daily Catechisation.

30. Though I had taken all proper care of my health, yet I found myself about this time very heavy and some times almost unfit for business even in the Morning hours, for which I consulted the Doctor at Tranquebar, and he knowing my Constitution answered me, that bleeding was the only Remedy for my indisposition. Upon this I followed his Advice, and had a large evacuation today, which had the desired Effect, so that afterwards I found myself revived and capable to keep close to my business.

The building would not go on so fast as I wished, therefore I did all what I could to come only so far, that I might inhabit the house before the hot Weather, & that the remaining part might be done as soon as the Circumstances would permit.

February.

The Portuguese Schoolmaster has behaved hitherto to my Satisfaction, only I found now and then, when I came unexpectedly to school, that he was too rigorous. Therefore I admonished and exhorted him, to try all other means, before he disciplined the boys, & to endeavour that they might rather love than fear him. Some boys, who absented themselves, had made a great complaint to their Parents and Relations, as if they had been used most unmercifully by the Schoolmaster, but after a formal enquiry, I found these things to be false. Others had complained, that they run away for want of vituals being half starved. But every body that was in the house, knew that they had their Vituals three times a day and in such quantity and quality, as it was certain their Parents could not allow them. As these objections might have been prejudicial to my Business, I took proper care, to convince those, who any way might be concerned in it, of the contrary. Some of the boys run away with their Cloaths, which had been given them, and their Parents were so unthankfull, that they would not give them again, till upon my application, they were ordered by their Captain to do so.

8. I began to continue to write the Latin signification to a very large and compleat Malabar Dictionary, which was first begun by the Missionaries at Tranquerbar, then continued and much augmented by M^r. Sartorius, & afterwards revised & augmented again at Tranquerbar, so that one copy now requires half a ream of paper. One copy being designed for M^r. Sartorius, the Malabar words were wrote in Tranquerbar, & M^r. Sartorius was to write the Latin to it, and make additions. In this he made a good progress, till by his death it was broke of. I resolved therefore to continue this as much as I could spare time from other Business, and so went on for a while, till I found that at present it would hinder me not only in my other Business, but would prejudice my health & chiefly my eyes which in this hot Climate are soon affected by much reading and writing. Therefore I left of again, though with a Resolution, to begin again as soon as possible.
20. I was visited more than once about this time by Bramines from Dewanapatnam and we talked of sciences & learning. They boasted in the usual way of their great skill and knowledge, against which I made now and then an exception, and mentioned something of the learning of the Europeans, not forgetting to tell them, that we esteemed our Ancestors and Predecessors as much as the Indians could theirs, but that notwithstanding all this our modern Scholars not contented with what was found out already, endeavoured every day to go further, when on the contrary the Indians without any meditation examination or enquiry adhered superstitiously to what was left them by their forefathers. As I knew that they value themselves chiefly on their pretended knowledge of Astronomy, Moons Age, Eclipses &c. I took an opportunity to tell them, how the European Astronomers had made such a great progress in this kind of knowledge by Telescopes and other excellent Instruments, which the Indians never made use of, nor did so much as the old Chaldeans, Arabians and Greeks, who constantly made Observations; but that they work'd their Almanacks only by Tables, which they had from their forefathers, and that many times their Tables were very insufficient. I asked them, if they knew the Eclipses for several years to come, which they answered in the Negative. Upon which I told them, that our Astronomers made their Calculations for a great many future Years, and that I had a book with me (Times Telescope) which gave an Account of those things for a number of years. They were mightily puzzled at this, so that they did not talk so high any more, and it happened to be divulged amongst the Bramines of this place, that I could tell the Moons Age, Eclipses &c. as well as any of them. In my conversation with the Bramines I choose this method to remove one great impediment, viz. their high Opinion, which they have of themselves, and the mean thoughts they have of the Europeans, whom they believe quite ignorant, and almost brutified. When I can convince them first, that the Europeans are skilled at least as well as they, and even a good deal better, it may under Gods blessing open me the way, and make them desirous for Christian Religion. Before I have removed this Impediment, I cannot have Confidence enough to talk with them on purpose of Religion. Though in conferring with them I always avoid all manner of disputing, not insisting upon Refutations, but only proposing what I can say of our ways and methods, and if I find them not inclined to fall in with my opinion, I break off, telling them, that when I have perfected myself more in the Language, I hope to have an opportunity to talk of the same thing again and perhaps to represent it in a stronger light and with more proper Expressions than now.
28. I received four Portuguese New Testaments from M^r. Schube at Madras, which were given by the Rev^d. M^r. Wynch, who was at Fort St. Davids some time ago and was desired to spare me a few out of the Church Library at Madras.
- March.
1. I did all what could be done to go on in the building, which went on a little slow for want of Materials & Labourers.