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SOME ACCOUNT

OF THE

TOWN OF ZANZIBAR,

BY

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ONE OF BISHOP TOZER'S CHAPLAINS.



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ZANZIBAR.



ANY of the friends of the Central African Mission have asked me, since my return, for an account of the town in which Bishop Tozer has established himself, and I find too that some misconceptions in regard to it are

not infrequent. I have, therefore, put down a few jottings about the place, which may, I hope, prove interesting to our friends, and, in their small degree, useful to the great cause of our Mission.

It has been asked why Zanzibar should have been made the head-quarters of the Central African Mission. The answer is simply because it is the capital of Eastern Africa. There is no town which has the least pretension to dispute such a title with it between Port Natal and Aden. One may almost say that it is more than the chief town, it is the only really large town and great centre of trade for all that immense coast, and the vast countries which lie behind it. Moçambique and the other Portuguese towns are so decayed, that they have barely one ship a year from their own country, and rely for their trade mainly upon an American house established in Zanzibar. And in the interior the Portuguese

traders are so hampered by excessive customs duties, and vexatious government interference, that traders from Zanzibar actually pass round their settlements and supply the tribes which lie behind them. Traders from Zanzibar have even penetrated to the Atlantic coast, after traversing the whole interior. It is not unusual for men to go out with goods, and travel for many years, buying and selling in different places, until they have accumulated enough to enable them to return as comparatively rich men. I was asking once how far some districts I had heard of might be from the coast, the answer was an account of a trader who went there: his son was not born when he left Kilwa, where the march began, he was able to run alone by the time the place was reached, and was between twelve and thirteen when his father returned to Zanzibar.

Nor is the town less important in a political point of view. Its ruler has admitted authority over all the coast from Cape Guardafui to Cape Delgado. In the Somauli country it makes a great difference in practice whether he has a ship of war at hand or no, but still he is the one person to be looked to. From Lamoo to Kilwa his dominion is complete. His power in the interior is of a less determinate kind, but he has now a governor in authority in the Nyamwezi country, and even at Ujiji on the Tanganyika lake, beside which he can bend any tribe he pleases to his wishes by stopping their trade, which must start from, or pass through his coast dominions.

One result of all this is too important to be passed by in silence, it is that the language of Zanzibar—the

Swahili—being the official and the trade language, is everywhere more or less understood, so that whereas if you learnt one of the up-country languages you would be a stranger everywhere else, if you have well mastered the Swahili you are at home everywhere, in every tribe you will find some who can act as interpreters, and who can at once open to you the intricacies of their own tongue. What other marks could distinguish a place as fitted for the head quarters of a Mission save such as these, which make this town the actual head quarters of trade, of government, and of language?

But after all Zanzibar is on an island. So it is, and so are Moçambique, and Mombas, and Lamoo, and all the great towns of this coast. They have all been built by settlers who were afraid of marauding tribes from the interior, and therefore always preferred some safe place to land their goods in. Another reason is that harbours on this coast are generally formed by islands, and Zanzibar has in many respects the best of them. Its island being large, about forty miles by sixteen, and a good distance from the mainland makes a safe place for cultivation, whereas the Portuguese at Moçambique, who are on a small island close to the mainland, have to pay blackmail to the Makua chiefs for leave to form a plantation, or build even a country house.

The actual position of the town may be well brought home to us by supposing London to stand where Cowes does on the Isle of Wight. The mainland is always visible, and many boats pass every day across to it.

Zanzibar is built on a sandy peninsula, in shape not unlike a shoe with a very long pointed toe, a shallow

creek almost dry at low water runs in round the toe and all but severs the heel from the mainland of the island. There is a bridge across the creek about half way down and another town or suburb on the mainland side.

When one approaches from the sea the air of business and activity is most striking, there are often in the harbour more than a hundred large native craft, lying packed together like ships in a dock, five or six men of war belonging to the Sultan (one of which was the Confederate *Shenandoah*, so notorious during the American war), and often eight or ten European ships taking in their cargoes of cloves, gumcopal, ivory, hides, red pepper, cocoa nut oil, orchilla weed and so forth.

The town itself shows a long front of square white houses built of stone. The whole aspect of the place from the sea is more Italian than African. When we land, however, the scene changes: there is no street practicable for wheeled vehicles, very few are more than ten or twelve feet wide, and in many places there is no proper street; but as it is the law that every one who builds a house should set up his scaffold on his own land, there is generally about a yard left outside the walls, and the six feet that thus intervene between the houses make the street. The greater part of the town consists only of mud and stud houses thatched with the cocconut leaf, these are divided by internal partitions into a number of small rooms, but have no light except from the door, as for the smoke, it finds its way through the thatch promiscuously. There are some chief thoroughfares and some streets of shops, which are merely small stone houses with the front of the bottom story

taken out, and are therefore quite open to the street, these are frequently protected by a narrow awning of cocoanut leaves, which is very annoying in wet weather, as you have no room to walk except either under the drip of these eaves, or exactly in the middle of the path where the rain-water is running in a stream. Not that the negroes feel so much annoyed as the Europeans do, for you may often see a man stand under the spout of a stone house and take a shower bath, or even take off his clothes and wash them in the rain-water and put them, or rather *it*, on again to dry.

No picture of a street in Zanzibar would be complete without two or three cows or a bull, of a small breed with humps, wandering about in search of something green. All the cattle of this part of Africa have humps, so that when we first showed our boys a picture of a cow they said "that's not a cow, where is the hump?" These cattle are excessively tame, I only heard of one, which having taken an antipathy to Europeans was shut up by its owner, not lest it should hurt the Europeans, but lest they should hurt it, which, in the eyes of its owner, a heathen Indian, would have been the greatest of calamities.

There are very few open spaces, the largest is what is called the great market (Soko kuu) close by the fort, a square-walled enclosure with a few round tub-shaped towers. Here between nine and twelve, every kind of fruit and vegetable is brought in on men's heads in immense quantities—oranges, cocoanuts, sugar cane, bananas, sweet potatoes, pine apples, casava root, but especially in their season mangoes, which are often car-

ried in a sort of basket called a *chimney* (dohaän) five or six feet high and not a foot and a half across, dressed out with green leaves and flowers. The chief remaining open space is the slave market.

One peculiar feature in the town of Zanzibar is that there are tombs, covered with white plaster, all over the town, sometimes many together, sometimes two or three or only one in some unexpected corner, another is the number of ruins. Our lamented coadjutor Mr. Drayton, who took great pains in exploring and mapping out the town, said there were as many stone houses in ruins as there were sound ones. This strange fact is chiefly the result of superstition. There is said to be a fear that if a man completes his house the next event to be anticipated is his own death, and therefore some part is often left to fall into ruin. But the common cause of abandoning a house is that it is supposed to be unlucky. There are a good many traces in that part of Africa of the notion that there is no such thing as natural death. If, therefore, several deaths occur in a house, the presumption is that there is some evil spirit which will not allow any one to live in it. Our own house was an instance of this; it was built by a very rich and powerful Arab named Salim Bushir, he was so great that rumour said possibly he might some day become the Sultan, and he resolved to build a house that should befit his greatness. So he laid it out on a very grand scale, but it so happened that at one corner there was what is called in Zanzibar an *Mzimu*, that is a place supposed to be haunted by some powerful spirit to which people make offerings and vows, there are many such in the

country, especially where that strange tree called a Baobab or Calabash tree grows; there is one near the town full of great nails which have been driven into it, I suppose, to fix the spirit, and we used generally in passing to see a few bananas, an egg or two, a little pot for burning incense, or some written charm deposited at its foot. However, the Mzimu I was speaking of was marked not by a tree but by some piece of stonework, possibly a tomb, which fell just within the site marked out for the house. Salim Bushir told his slaves to break it up, but not a man would stir, so he took up an iron bar and broke it up himself. From that time men watched him. But he went on prospering, he built his house, as houses are built in Zanzibar, carrying the walls up as high as a man could reach, then having a feast and leaving the work to dry and settle, then building on again and leaving that to dry, till all was finished. And it was thoroughly well finished, the front door alone cost more than a hundred pounds. The house was opened with a feast to which all the town was invited, but within a year after, Salim Bushir was dead; he was succeeded by a brother, who died within eighteen months, and then no one could be persuaded to live in the house any more. The family became involved in a struggle against the Sultan; and he compelled them to sell him the house for about a third of its value, that he might lend it to the British navy as a store place. Several portions of it were getting ruinous, and when we came to Zanzibar the Navy had just given it up after putting it roughly into repair. Colonel Playfair (then the British consul and political agent and an excellent friend to us) advised

us to take it, as being the best and healthiest house we could hope to find, as indeed it is, lying at the corner of the town which projects most into the sea and rising above all its neighbours so as to catch whatever breeze is stirring. We found it full of coal-dust and many of the windows broken away and shutters gone, and have been repairing and improving ever since, but we found a difficulty in getting men even to come and work in the house, such was their fear of the spirit, and I have often kicked away from that corner of the house pots of incense set there by the work people as a propitiation. People used to come and ask us to let them into our grounds to pray there, and when a solemn procession is made round the town, as it is sometimes, to deprecate plague or famine, they always pause there. I used to hope we might some day build a church and place its altar over the site of this old superstition, and as, since I left, Bishop Tozer has bought the house at a very advantageous rate it is now quite possible.

Such then is the town of Zanzibar, in a climate where winter and summer are hardly marked by any difference of heat or of the length of the day, the thermometer seldom standing far from eighty degrees in the house, and the sun always rising and setting within twenty minutes of six o'clock. There are never storms nor ever a really high wind for more than half an hour or so at a time. The strongest marks of season are the rains, the less in November the greater in April or from March till June. These occur when the wind is uncertain: from December to March it blows from the north, from June to October it blows from the south. After the

great rains comes the cold season in June and July when the thermometer sometimes goes down to seventy-five degrees and sets everybody shivering. In such a climate one can understand how people come to lose count of time and forget how old they are.

As to the people, the basis of the whole are the mixed race, between Arab and Negro, whom we call Swahili. The history of the coast is merely that of a succession of Arab conquests. One tribe came down, conquered the negroes and then sunk into an effete state by mixing with the natives and adopting their customs. Then followed another tribe, conquered, intermarried, lost its energy, and made way for a fresh tribe of conquerors. The effect of all this is a race and language in which arabic and negro elements are thoroughly mixed up together. The father of the present Sultan partly inherited, partly conquered the coast, being also ruler of Muscat, which lies near the mouth of the Persian Gulf. The great men and rulers are now chiefly Arabs from Muscat and Oman. The merchants and traders, even to the smallest shopkeepers, are Indians from Cutch and Bombay, either Mohammedan Indians who settle in Zanzibar, or heathen Indians, known as Banyans, who never bring their wives with them, and only come for a time to trade and make such fortunes as they may be able. The lowest class are the African negroes from the interior, slaves or free men. It is hard to tell who is a slave and who is not, as it is very common for slaves to pay their masters two dollars a month, and then shift for themselves as they best may. The lowest pay, for work which does not require much thought, is eight

pice, or threepence, a day; this is about the two dollars a month; it will just feed and clothe a man, but then he must eat muhogo or casava root, which, when dried and pounded, makes a common sort of arrow root, and for a relish to it, he will get about a cubic inch of salt shark, while, as for his clothes, two yards of unbleached calico will supply him for half a year handsomely.

Skilled workmen get about a quarter of a dollar, or about a shilling a day, which is very good wages. But those who dress and behave like gentlemen get what would seem to us very little. I was thinking what I could reasonably charge for Bibles and Testaments in Arabic, and made enquiries to find out how much people were likely to have to spend; one man in particular, a man of learning and a teacher, made, I found, about five shillings a week, so I concluded that he was not likely to have much to spend in books.

Besides these great races, there are specimens of nearly every nation. There are Arabs of other tribes than the Muscat people, particularly the people of Sheher, who do all that requires strength and energy, they are the soldiers, butchers, makers of coarse mats and baskets, and many of them carry loads as porters. There are the people of the Comoro Islands, another mixed race of Arabs and Negroes, who are the head-servants and overlookers, and the tailors of the place. There are Indians of many races, Turks, Persians, Belcochees, and Abyssinians. The people from Madagascar have a quarter of their own. Among the women slaves are Georgians, Circassians and Greeks. There are Negroes from every tribe and country, and, not least in importance,

what are called by the natives, *Wazungu*, that is, strange, startling unaccountable folk, and they are our own European selves, from the half-caste Portuguese of Goa to the last American improvements. The standing population of the town may very probably be a hundred thousand, which is largely increased, when the northerly wind blows, by the traders and sailors from all parts of India and Arabia, many of whom come down, according to the immemorial course of trade, when the northerly wind blows, and wait till the southerly wind comes, in a few months, to blow them back again. I must not forget to mention those who have indirectly furnished us with part of our school and are called in Zanzibar *Tende Halua*, that is *Dates and sweet stuff*, from their habit of alluring with such dainties young slaves into their houses, whence they ship them off to Arabia. These men come from the Arabian shore of the Persian Gulf, and have been pirates from time immemorial, they bring a little salt fish and steal a return cargo. It was with one of their Dhows that the men of H.M.S. *Wasp* had so severe a fight some years since, and nine children from it are still in our schools at Zanzibar.

The lives of the people of Zanzibar are, for the most part, as monotonous as their climate. I was asking one man why he did nothing, and he said "Oh, I have no money to buy a slave." The very first idea is that if anything is to be done you must buy a slave to do it. Thus if a man comes into a little money in any way, he either spends it at once in drunkenness and dissipation, or, if he be prudent, buys a piece of land in the country, and then he buys a few slaves and settles them

upon the land; they cultivate it and bring in the produce, while he sits at home in the town and eats it.

The usual course of a day, from native accounts I had of it, is something of this kind: soon after daylight a man will wake, and, if he is at all devout, go through his morning devotions; he then lies or sits on his bed (which is a light wooden frame laced with thin cocoanut cord, and covered with a mat) until about ten or eleven o'clock, when he dresses and goes out. Every house is furnished with a seat called a *baraza*, outside the door, made of stone if it be a stone house, or of earth if it be a mud house, here the master spreads a mat and sits awaiting callers. If our friend meets anyone, or finds anyone sitting on his *baraza*, he says *Hujambo*, Are you well? to which the invariable answer is *Sijambo*, I am well, after which you go into the question of ailments. Even if you are dying you must begin by saying, "I am well," and after that explain your fears and feelings. When the subject of health is exhausted you must ask after the news, *Habari gani*, What news? to which the answer is *Njema*, Good. This is for the sake of the omen. If you ventured to say, "Bad," you would throw all your hearers into a state of dread and horror. So you must say, "Good," first, and then qualify its goodness in any way you may deem necessary.

After a few such greetings noon has arrived and the wife has some food ready, a large dish of rice and a little fish cooked with curry, or, for a richer man, a fowl and some sweetmeats and fruit. After these are discussed and some water drunk, they wash their hands, which is always done by an attendant pouring water

over the hands, as we read of Elisha's pouring water on the hands of Elijah. Then they lie down and have a doze. Between three and four the man dresses himself with his best care and scents himself, if he be at all a dandy, and, taking his stick or his rosary in his hand, goes out to make the grand round of his friends' houses, looking very picturesque in his turban and long flowing garments. Those who do not go out sit on their own barazas, and generally have a supply of coffee ready for all comers of sufficient standing, this is drunk, without milk or sugar, in a very small cup without a handle, set into another cup, or, among very great people, in a small filagree stand, to avoid burning one's fingers. In formal visits sherbet is also served, which is, for the most part, nothing but French syrup diluted with water. If any one receives you with great affection, a long-necked silver bottle is brought and you are sprinkled or even deluged with rose water or some other cheap scent.

About sunset the man goes home again, performs his sunset prayers, and has another meal of the same kind as before, he and those that are with him dipping with their hands out of the common dish. During the course of the day he has bathed once or twice, by having water poured over him. When it is well dark it is his wife's turn to go out, and so the day is ended.

The inversions of our European customs are very curious: not only do people take off their shoes instead of their hats, but it is the highest praise you can give anyone to say that he is a *slow man with a cold heart*; a man, that is, who is neither hot nor hasty in his temper, and whose heart is like a piece of ice, the most delightful

and refreshing thing you could easily think of. It is a fundamental rule of good breeding not to do what will make yourself or anybody else hot, you must walk slowly and keep as cool as you can. Again, amongst the Mohammedans, it is held profane *not* to introduce the Name of GOD into everything you say, and, if there is a pause in the conversation, some one will put in an ejaculation, such as Allah akbár, God is great, and then the conversation goes on as before. Sometimes your friend, being at a loss what to say, says, *Jambo* or *Jambo sana*, as much as to say, Are you well? or Are you very well? and so the rudeness of sitting looking at one another is avoided. So, once more, it is very contrary to our notions that women go out freely after dark, while it is reckoned very improper for them to be seen at all in the daytime: and, again, the women wear trousers and the men do not.

It is to be confessed that idle as the men's lives are, those of the women are still emptier; a little cooking and sweetmeat-making is their only recognized employment; needlework is man's work and only a few women know how to do it. To lie on a bed and be fanned by a couple of slave girls, is the most usual occupation of the richer women; the class below them plait the various coloured mats which serve for bedding; the lowest of all carry stones, and lime, and, chief of all their employments, water. For, in the town of Zanzibar, there is none but brackish water to be had, and so one of the first steps in house-keeping is to hire women (we hired eight) to go out two, three, or even more miles, to fetch in water on their heads. The ways that lead out of the

town are always full of women going and coming with their water jars, round red earthen jars which hold two or three gallons, and their *Katas*, which are cocoanut shells at the end of a long stick, to scoop up the water out of the pits, which serve as wells.

There is a work of vast importance to be done amongst the women of Zanzibar, which only English women can do. They need instruction in every way, few only can read at all, or have any idea beyond the narrow limits of their own idle gossiping customs, the slave women being their great purveyors of news. This work would be the more important because the truest affection which exists in Zanzibar is that between a man and his mother. Children of the same mother are really brothers and sisters, and a man's home is generally with his mother, the tie of marriage counts for far less than that of kinship. A bride's father is bound to provide her a house, and her husband is bound to spend a certain portion of his time with her, and if he has several wives to give them each an equal share of attention. The wife always feels that she belongs to her father and brothers much more than to her husband, and, to secure a certain community of feeling, it is quite a rule to marry a first cousin if one is procurable.

I was three times allowed to see the ladies of the family, or, rather, I think, they were allowed to see me as a great curiosity, being an Mzungu who could even write and read off from a printed paper their own language. On one of these occasions there was a wedding in progress, the bride being about ten years old, at which age it is usual to marry.

Nothing can exceed the politeness of all classes, especially of the people of Zanzibar itself; I could generally tell people who came from Mombas and other places by a certain roughness of manner though they were far from rude. The Sultan himself comes down into the street to receive his European visitors, and insists upon their preceding him into the house and upstairs into his reception-room, and, after the interview, follows them again into the street to take leave. It is customary for the visitor to ask leave to go, and the reply asks if you have any unsatisfied desire, the most proper answer to which is to say that you only desire your host's prosperity. It is very common to tell you that the house is yours, and that if there is anything in it you desire, a hint will suffice.

For myself, I always experienced the greatest kindness from men of all classes. One of the most learned, when I was leaving, wrote me a sort of valedictory address and sealed it with his own seal, that I might always have an evidence of the respect and esteem in which he held me. Another friend sent me enough green coconuts (which furnish a very favorite drink) to last, as he hoped, all the voyage, and they did last till we were off the Cape. Another, a schoolmaster, who happened to be out of town when I was making my farewell visits, heard of it at the last moment, when I was actually embarked, came down to the shore with a friend, borrowed a boat, and rowed himself off to take leave of me. I will mention but one thing more, it shall be a polite speech of the Chief Vizir's when I was taking leave, who said he could only bear the parting in the hope that, in get-

ting our grammar and dictionary printed in England, I might be building a bridge over which the thoughts of Zanzibar might pass to England, and English learning and wisdom find their way to Zanzibar.

And perhaps our own wishes could hardly have been expressed more neatly.



