

Isenberg & Knapf

CHAPTER II.

RETURN TO ANKOBAR—ACCOUNT OF A SUPERSTITIOUS CEREMONY—REMARKS—SLAVES IN THE SERVICE OF THE KING—CONVERSATIONS ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS—NOTICES OF THE GOVERNMENT, DISCIPLINE, AND USAGES OF THE ABYSSINIAN CHURCH—VISIT TO THE KING AT ANGOLLALA—DISCUSSION WITH DEBTERA SANDJAR ON DOCTRINAL POINTS—MR. ISENBERG'S INTERVIEW WITH THE KING PREVIOUS TO HIS DEPARTURE FROM SHOA—MR. KRAPP RETURNS TO ANKOBAR—VISIT TO ALACA WOLDA HANNA—CONVERSATION WITH PRIEST TSED-DOO ON BAPTISM—VISIT TO THE ALACA OF AFERBEINI—CUSTOMS OF THE GALLAS—ABYSSINIAN MODE OF INSTRUCTING YOUTHS—CEREMONY AT BAPTISM—NOTICES OF VARIOUS TRIBES.

Sept. 27, 1839—The King having sent us word, that we should go with him to Angollala, I resolved on returning to Ankobar. Mr. Isenberg followed the King to Angollala, in order to take leave of him. I arrived at Ankobar about three o'clock in the afternoon. On entering the town, I was stopped by the people of the Governor, to wait for orders from him. I went on my way, however, knowing that the King had given no orders to prevent my entering the town. A great number of those who had visited us before for instruction, came to ask how I did, and whether we were all well.

Sept. 28—Mr. Isenberg arrived this morning at Ankobar. He brought me the news, that a messenger

has arrived from Adowah, informing the King of the arrival of four Europeans, who wished to come to Shoa. The same messenger brought the news, that Oobieh, the Zetshesmatsh of Tigré, had put Cassai, the son of Sabagadis, in fetters.

Sept. 30—Since the people have learned that Mr. Isenberg intends to leave Shoa, they have come in numbers begging for medicine. This morning one of our copyists came asking medicine for a monk. Mr. Isenberg took the opportunity to speak to him about monkery. The rainy season seems to be coming again, it having rained very much for the last few days. Sawold repeated his visit to us, and turned the conversation again to the subject of Chronology. In the evening the son of Alaca Wolda Serat came begging us to teach him Geography. Several boys and priests were here. I have finished with Guebra Georgis, the Geography, and in the Universal History I have proceeded as far as the time of the Reformation. I have also read with him the Gospels of St. Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

October 1—Very early this morning, the son of Alaca Wolda Serat came. I began to instruct him in Geography. Afterward, the son of the Alaca of Aferbeini came, bringing the Psalms I had sent him, saying, that the Alaca wished for something greater than that, of which he would inform to us. We sent him word, that it caused us much pain to see those, whose duty it was to teach others, not like the Word of God. He went away; but returned in the af-

ternoon, saying, that we should not be offended, as the Alaca had already received a copy of the Psalms from a monk who got it at Axum, and was not in want of another ; but that he would be glad of a New Testament.

Our Workie asked us, whether we knew anything of the traveller Arada, who came to Abyssinia, and having travelled in so many other countries, became a proverb in Abyssinia ; as for instance, Ras Michael having returned with his troops to Gondar from the country of the Gooderoos, said, " We have travelled like Arada."

This evening we witnessed a very mournful ceremony. A woman in our house, the wife of a man from Gurague, began suddenly to sing. At first we did not listen to her ; but several times repeating her song, we asked what it was. Guebra Georgis told us, that she wished to expel the bad spirits which she imagined would inflict her with sickness. In singing she repeated the words ; " Lamana saijasu gena"—a prayer before the bad spirits are seizing me. Having finished her song, she smoked for a few minutes, and then sung again ; which having done she moved her head in every direction. I went to her, and asked what she was doing. At first I thought that she was out of her senses, as she gave me no answer. Mr. Isenberg, who was rather unwell to-day, also came to see her. He asked her, whether she was in the service of Satan ? But she continued her idolatrous ceremony. The people standing by brought her a red hen, which she

kissed and put on her neck ; but the hen of course did not stay there. She then moved her head again and changed her clothes. Mr. Isenberg again spoke to her about her sinful performances. We were about to leave her, when she said, " May God come upon you, that you came to me." Mr. Isenberg replied, " How do you know God, as you serve the false god like the heathens ?" We then returned to our room, and asked our boy about the meaning of the ceremony, when he gave us the following particulars. The Gallas and all of the people of Gurague and Shoa, who are smokers, believe that there are eighty-eight spirits, which they call Sarotsh—in the singular, Sar—These spirits are said to walk about and inflict men with sickness ; and hence, when such persons feel sick, they take their refuge in superstitious means. By smoking and singing, moving their body, and particularly by offering a hen to the Sar, they imagine that they can frighten away the bad spirit and secure themselves against being sick. The Sarotsh are divided into two parties, each having its Alaca or head. One Alaca is called Mama, who has forty-four Sarotsh under his command : the name of the other Alaca is Warrer, and has the same number of Sarotsh under him. Each Sar has a particular name. When persons perform such a ceremony, they speak in another language. Thus, for instance, they call a hen, " Tshari"—in the Amharic, a hen is called Doro. The hen is afterward slaughtered and eaten by the assistants, except the brains, which are

only eaten by the person who has performed the most part. In choosing a hen they prefer a red one. The King has given orders to abolish this heathenish custom, and the priests have forbidden the people to smoke, having observed that all smokers are fond of this custom.

These proceedings characterize very much the Christians of Abyssinia. They mix all together—Christianity, Judaism, Mahomedanism, and Heathenism. The ceremony just mentioned is common to them, as well as the Gallas; and the opinion of the above mentioned priest, respecting the interpolations of Scripture made by the Jews, is evidently a Mahomedan doctrine. Their distinctions of clean and unclean food, and the use of circumcision, as well as many other ceremonies, are clear evidences of a mixture with Judaism. We cannot expect a better state of religion among them, inasmuch as a string of silk put around their necks as a sign of their Christianity—mortification of their flesh by much fasting—a strict separation from Mahomedans by not eating with them—their kissing churches—imploring Saints—disputing about the births of Christ—pilgrimages to Jerusalem, or to the grave of Tecla Haimanot—all these things together cannot change their hearts, nor secure them against the inroads of Satan. The priests, instead of conducting the people to Christ, assume the lordship over them, engrossing their attention with vain fables and stories of saints, to whom they direct them for refuge as

their Saviours. Hence ignorance, superstition, fleshly sins, particularly fornication, have prevailed among the people; so that we may well wonder at the remnant of Christianity which still exists in this country. Who can cure the wounds of Abyssinia, but the Lord by His Spirit and His Word? To give them His Spirit we are unable; but we can serve them by supplying them with the Word of God. The Holy Scriptures must not only be laid down before the people, but they must be explained to them by word and by writing; and the youth must be instructed in the holy truths of the Bible. The Lord be praised that He has enabled us to make a beginning, though a small one. The people know distinctly who we are, and why we have come to their country. A number of persons have heard the sound doctrines of the Gospel, by reading the Scriptures and conversation with them. Mr. Isenberg has endeavoured to further our object, partly by conversing with the people who came to us, and partly by preparing several school-books, which I could make use of after his departure. I have, on my part, endeavoured, besides the Æthiopic and Amharic studies, to read with the people in the Holy Scriptures, in reading which I have got as far as the first Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians. The Lord grant that the number of our scholars may increase, as well as our means in receiving a great quantity of books; but, above all, may He grant that we may be filled with the spirit of faith, love, wisdom, and prayer!