The peoples of Zanzibar, their customs and religious beliefs

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THE PEOPLES OF ZANZIBAR
THEIR CUSTOMS AND RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

BY
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THE UNIVERSITIES' MISSION TO CENTRAL AFRICA
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Preface

This little book has been written in compliance with a request made to me by the Bishop of Zanzibar some time ago. It has been completed at home, unfortunately without the books of reference used in Zanzibar. It has been compiled with two objects in view. (1) To supply any new-comer to Zanzibar with a small manual which will give him a summary view of the situation, and to suggest to him useful lines of inquiry. (2) To give people at home, who are helping the Mission, some rough kind of idea of the nature of the situation in which missionaries find themselves, and of the difficulties with which the staff in Zanzibar have to cope.

It makes no pretence at all to be a full treatment of any of the subjects discussed in the separate chapters. A large book might be written on any one of them. But the compiler hopes that it may prove a help to some and serve as a bunch of keys with which to unlock the doors of the various subjects contained in the book. Any corrections, criticisms or suggestions will be thankfully received. In dealing with other religions I have tried to write courteously and fairly, and have written not with the intention of scoring points, but of simply explaining how matters really stand. I sincerely hope the book may prove helpful to some interested in the Mission Field to-day.
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CHAPTER I

The Inhabitants of Zanzibar

It is very difficult, perhaps it is impossible, to procure any certain information with regard to the original inhabitants of Zanzibar. Now and again I have heard of manuscripts in Arabic, or in Swahili written in Arabic characters, which are said to contain all the historical facts available. One such is said to exist in the north of Pemba, another somewhere to the north of Zanzibar, but there seems to be a disinclination on the part of the owners of these MSS. to show them to a European, and it is not by any means certain that, even if procurable, these MSS. would prove to be of any value. Probably they contain traditional lore handed down from generation to generation, and at last committed to writing in fairly recent times by some enterprising scribe. We are therefore compelled to rely on conclusions which rest partly on facts as we see them now, and partly on inferences which the situation of the Island of Zanzibar justifies us in drawing. The reader is asked to remember this in reading the following pages. There is not yet, perhaps never will be, sufficient justification for dogmatic statements that such and such was the order of events.

There is a belief prevalent in the Island that the original inhabitants migrated from the mainland. The Wahadimu say they came from the mainland, from Mrima, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Dar-es-salaam. There is another belief that the Watu-
mbatu, in the small narrow Island off the north-west coast of Zanzibar, came from the Wasegeju tribe on the mainland to the north-west of the Island of Zanzibar. This was probably the case. The cause of immigration we are left to guess. They may have been driven out of their country by war or by famine, or they may have been attracted by the excellent fishing which the Island of Zanzibar affords. Perhaps all these causes combined to induce them to settle down where we find them now. They are not unlike each other, these two peoples. They seem to be a link between the native of the interior and the coast people, the Swahili. They are not so simple as the former, but simpler than the latter in their manner of life. Both peoples have the reputation of being more moral than the people of the coast towns, and it is generally said that they are longer lived and have larger families than the coast folk. At any rate we are not extravagant in the use of our imagination if we picture to ourselves the Island of Zanzibar in the remote past as occupied by these two peoples mostly living in villages on or near the shore, and principally engaged in fishing. Their chief enemies were the wild pigs, which caused so much harm to the crops of maize, cassava and sweet potatoes, that they were compelled in places to surround their plantations with stone walls, roughly built of coral rag. Occasionally a ship of the dhow kind from the North, from South Arabia, from the Persian Gulf, from India, from the Red Sea, perhaps from the Malay Peninsula would put in to one of the harbours, as it skirted the coast of East Africa, in pursuit of merchandise, coming with the North Monsoon. They came and departed and the Watumbatu and the Wahadimu went on fishing.

There is not much to be said about the Watumbatu—there are about 1000 of them. They claim to be descended from a Shirazi Princess who was driven from Kilwa centuries ago, but they do not show any resemblance in their features to justify such a claim. They