



A Voyage to Abyssinia

Father Jerome Lobo

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A husband that doth not like his wife may easily find means to make the marriage void, and, what is worse, may dismiss the second wife with less difficulty than he took her, and return to the first; so that marriages in this country are only for a term of years, and last no longer than both parties are pleased with each other... - from "The Manner of Eating in Abyssinia, Their Dress, Their Hospitality, and Traffic" What makes this 17th-century work notable is not its tale of the nine years a Portuguese priest spent in Abyssinia as a missionary, although that certainly makes this a unique work of both travel and religious writing. What sealed this travelogue's place in history is that it was translated from French (the original Portuguese version was never published) into English by Samuel Johnson and published anonymously in 1735. With the wit and grace that cemented Johnson's standing as an icon of English literature, Johnson takes "great liberties," he admits in his preface, "and let the judicious part of mankind pardon or condemn them." Let the judicious reader celebrate them. JEROME LOBO (1593-1678) was born in Lisbon and spent much of his life traveling the East as a missionary. British essayist and critic DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON (1709-1784) created the first English dictionary, published in 1755. He may be the most quoted writer in the English language, after Shakespeare.

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