

"THE GERMS NEVER HAD IT SO GOOD."

One night, shortly after our removal to Pretoria, Betty ran down the room, shivering and ill. We stood next to her for more than an hour while she shivered, went stiff, and moaned with pain. We massaged her arms and hands. We rang the bell, and after fifteen minutes Matron arrived. She explained to us that the doctor was off duty, and went away to see if she could find out where he was. Eventually she came back with a Medical Orderly, who was at a loss to know what to do.

After an hour and a half, the doctor arrived (we called this doctor 'Frankenstein', because of his close resemblance to Boris Karloff; he rarely spoke, never smiled, sometimes growled.) By this time Betty had recovered from the worst part of her attack, which we believe was brought on through being given the wrong pills.

We were not impressed with the medical treatment in gaol.

Our poor opinion of prison doctors had been formed at the Fort, where the first doctor we met, on the first day, defended prison food as being a scientifically-worked out 'balanced' diet. He maintained that no prisoner ever left gaol weighing less than when he went in (how he knew this, as no detainee ever reported being weighed on entry, we did not know.) We had to assume that those who could stomach prison food and conditions put on weight on the diet of mealie-pap, mealies or beans, and mealie-pap, while those who could not, died.

Our men had already experienced the difficulties of arousing anyone at night, after lock-up time, when Monty had become ill at the Fort. The warder on duty was casual and unconcerned about the fact that he, too, was locked in, and since the alarm-bell did not work, was not able to make contact with anyone at all. From every prison, detainees reported on the filthy conditions, the lack of hygiene, and the casual attitude of the medical officers.

"Medical treatment in gaol is wishful thinking," wrote one Detainee who had been held at Boksburg. "If you fall ill, you can only pray that you will recover with time."

In Boksburg Prison, an old convict did most of the medical work. Abraham was an inmate of Boksburg, an old man of 79, but very spry and active for his age. He was known as 'Doc.' Abraham worked in the prison hospital, diagnosed all the ailments, and knew all the remedies. He dispensed, gave injections.

Although he had a ~~gentle~~ gentle appearance, he was actually a brutal person, who hit convicts. The men assumed that he did this to curry favour with the white warders. He was their ideal. All convicts who did work for the warders were 'good' prisoners.

There were many rackets run in this gaol. Tobacco, a quarter of a pound of which could normally be bought for 1/- anywhere outside prison, was sold by Abraham for 8/-. He would also concoct a mixture of some drugs and methylated spirits - gaol brandy - and sell this at 2/1 a tot.

*7 of them made case to ...  
hand ...  
Dated treatment*

"The death of a young African prisoner, Daniel Kondile, will always haunt me," wrote a Boksburg detainee. "This strapping youth of 24 had been arrested and sentenced to 3 months imprisonment for failing to pay tax.

"He was brought to the gaol hospital - which was just an ordinary cell, but with beds in it - in a dreadful state. He had been ill for some days, but his illness had been ignored by the authorities who said he was 'playing sick.' When he vomited blood he was taken to the hospital cell.

"He breathed heavily and with difficulty. He could not sleep - something appeared to hurt him, and he would slump forward, bending his back. Each time, the convict orderly would smack him and push him back.

"The orderly said that Daniel had double pneumonia. The white medical orderly never came near the patients. The gaol doctor called twice a week, but never felt a pulse or used his stethoscope. The prescription for Daniel was on the cell wall - but never made up, and never given to him.

"Early one morning, before 5, his breathing grew louder. We were all awake. We lay and listened. Then it was softer. He shouted once and slumped forward. He was dead.

"Later, we were told he had died from meningitis."

In every prison the medical routine appeared to be similar. If you were ill, you told the doctor what was wrong with you, and without an examination of any sort, he would prescribe pills or medicines on the basis of what you thought was wrong and what he thought might be wrong.

The African men detainees in Cape Town said that each morning those who wished to ~~see~~ could visit the doctor or the sick-bay orderly. This official seemed to be of the opinion that different ailments could be cured with the same kind of medicine, so that after a while most detainees no longer visited the "hospital" for any other reason but to relieve the boredom of being locked up. They referred to the excursion as "dropping in at the pub for a drink."

Coloured detainee George Peake suffered from gout throughout his detention at Roeland Street, and had to be carried about on the backs of his friends. The prison doctor could offer no relief except to tell George that he had to wait until his foot had swollen to a suitable size before any action could be taken. Only when the detainees were moved to a new prison at Worcester did he receive proper medical treatment for his complaint.

~~Some of the older men at Cape Town, men with hardly any teeth left for eating, found it difficult to chew the lunchtime mealies and beans, which were invariably hard. They reported to the prison doctor, who prescribed - mealie-pap, three times a day instead of twice.~~

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16

mouth became coated with a rim of fat. Seeing their untouched bowls of mealie-meal one morning, the doctor <sup>remarked</sup> delivered himself of this gem: "You should eat that - it is full of minerals."

One of these detainees, a sixty-five-year-old farmer, was in poor health. He suffered from pains in his chest, sore gums and constipation. One morning he suddenly doubled up with pain, and with difficulty the other men got him to lie on his mattress. The doctor came a few hours later, and did not even bother to bend down and examine him as he lay on the floor. To cure constipation, he remarked, lie on your stomach.

Some of the detainees had more serious ailments. An Indian, Solly Nathie, was a diabetic. ~~He had first~~ <sup>He</sup> contracted a persistent cough and headaches, later diagnosed as broncho-pneumonia, after sleeping on cement floors when he was arrested for Treason in 1956. Then, in 1957, during the Treason Trial Preparatory Examination, he sat next to a man suffering from active pulmonary tuberculosis. Solly's own cough became worse, he lost weight, and his health rapidly went downhill. It was found that he had contracted t.b.

He now had to take injections and medicines to control both conditions, and in addition, had to adhere to a diet of milk, lean meat, fresh and halfcooked vegetables, eggs and fresh fruit, which were essential to maintaining his health. He had to achieve a medium between maintaining a sufficient protein intake with adequate caloric requirements and the control of blood sugar by avoiding excessive carbohydrates and fats.

When the t.b. was under control, the doctors warned him to prevent exposure to colds and physical injuries, to maintain regular habits of sleep, etc., and to wear warm clothes.

~~Excuse me, I am not a doctor~~ When he was detained at the Fort, efforts were made to obtain for Solly the tablets, milk, food, mattress and hot water facilities that he needed. He did get some of these facilities, but at Pretoria he was not provided with a mattress, milk, or some of the drugs that he needed. His condition deteriorated steadily during the time he was detained.

Nana Sita, former chairman of the Transvaal Indian Congress, suffered from gout and rheumatism. There was a time when he had to crawl on all fours in ~~his~~ his cell when he had to use the bucket. He was never given medical attention.

An African woman in Cape Town, Elizabeth Parella, suffered badly from epileptic fits. She had frequent fits during her detention, and when the women were being moved to the 'country' gaol, she was unconscious for most of the journey.

"We were next door to the hospital," reported one of the men detainees in Pretoria. "We used to see hundreds of African convicts lined up, stripped to the waist, and in the space of a few minutes the doctor had examined the lot of them."

Many of the detainees, in prisons where ~~men~~ large numbers were locked up together, dreaded the thought that one of them would become ill in the night. It was obvious that the warders would make no effort to obtain assistance, particularly where the Africans were concerned.

"Laat hom vrek!" (Let him peg out) a Port Elizabeth warder commented when one of the detainees had an attack of asthma spasms. The asthma victim was alone in a little storeroom one evening, and detainees in a cell opposite, hearing his gasps, called to the warder to come. "Die man is sick in die ander kamer," (The man is sick in the other room) they told him. The warder followed his "Laat hom vrek" with a string of unprintable remarks.

One morning in this prison, shortly after the lights had been switched on at 5.30, a man began banging the grill, shouting "Warder! Warder!" He continued to do so for some time before the warder responded from some distance; when he was asked to come and open because a man was seriously ill, he commented "Is hy dood?" (Is he dead?) and walked away.

The men continued to call him, and on the second occasion he repeated the same question, then remarked "Ek sal net nou kom," (I won't come now) and kept away. The men called and requested someone to open up for a long time before the warder eventually returned. Meanwhile, the sick man lay helpless on his mat.

But the callousness of warders, <sup>and</sup> the casual lack of concern of the doctors were not the worst features of the lack of attention to health in the prisons: it was the sheer lack of hygiene, the filth, that was so obvious and that caused the authorities so little concern. "The germs never had it so good," remarked a doctor-detainee. For prisoners to have to use latrine buckets, without the luxury of toilet paper, and then to have to dig ~~unwash~~ fingers into a mass of mealie-pap before having an opportunity of washing, without even a spoon to use - this in 1960 - made us think that the prison doctors had qualified in the middle ages, and had never heard of germs.

Wed 20 July. This morning Comrade Lemba was admitted to the  
 local hospital. Although he is a pulmonary case at this  
 taken the authorities 4 months to make up their  
 minds to give him suitable treatment under colonial  
 conditions. Occasionally he had been given a cough  
 mixture to ease his chest - the same mixture which everyone  
 of us received if we were coughing. It was apparent to us  
 though that his health was declining fast and at times  
 he remained for days without speaking - evidently to  
 conserve energy.

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Caldwell Mwanosa & Veronique Mimi have been out for  
 months (26 Aug) They have been to the Dr. who does not  
 examine them, but persists in prescribing ~~Stops~~ "Sterksalt"  
 In the last few days particularly unwell, & when Super came,  
 asked permission to allow for private practitioners to examine them.  
 He refused, but within a few hours, special medical treatment  
 was provided.

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*A neg. of Ketumohle. Cases of trench with Dental treatment.*

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