

undated.

(Health - General)

THE AFRICAN CONCEPT OF DISEASE N8.3

The African concept of disease reflects his stage of development or lack of development in the history of the human race from the point of view of science and technology. It is his idea of interpretation of phenomena or of nature and their control based on beliefs and traditions instead of being based upon ascertainable and verifiable facts although there are certain manifestations which, however, we disbelieve and try to explain away seem to prove the existence of something. Although these beliefs and their manifestations may appear silly, absurd and illogical to us here, they are real, rational, logical and even scientific from the point of view of the minds concerned. This might sound a little contradictory on my part. They see what they believe ; they believe and imagine what they are told and sometimes see.

There are hardly any questions and/or investigation of a given situation. All is taken for granted and accepted because it is believed. Faith and belief require no demonstration.

The concept is more or less universal historically and in scope with variations in practice and detail among different peoples and tribes in certain stages of technological development. There are certain words and expressions and certain ways of behaviour even among the more technologically advanced members of the human race which seem to be reminders or survivals of a similar concept among them in the dim past or perhaps before the fourteenth century when witches were not unknown in continental Europe and this tends to show our common origin and heritage although some sections of the human race have been left behind in the forward march in acquisition of knowledge and of technological development.

In this concept of disease you will note that magic, medicine and religion are hardly distinguishable from one another ; in fact, they often combine, supplement each other or run imperceptibly into one another. Prayers, supplications, incantations, acts or propitiation or atonement and medicinal treatment often run concurrently or follow each other depending upon the cause of the disease diagnosed because it is the cause of the disease and not the disease itself which is diagnosed or is the object of divination.

I have said that the concept is traditional (and traditions change) to imply the factor of change as a result of culture contact, acculturation and other environmental influences of the people or peoples concerned.

Both anatomical and physiological knowledge is most rudimentary and inaccurate if at all. Pharmacology and materia medica are empirical, founded, as they are, on the knowledge of drugs which were inspired through dreams, inherited from relatives or acquired by purchase or training in their use as initiates or novitiates with no idea of their active principles and medicinal values.

The concept includes and involves within its scope the individual, the family, the Chief, the tribe, their crops, animals and other possessions, success or failure and well-being of these concerned. All these can be affected beneficially and malevolently by certain agencies under human control and direction which can be diagnosed, treated and/or prevented by properly inspired persons who have the knowledge or training.

Before dealing with the causes of disease under this concept of disease, I would like to make certain things clear to avoid any misconceptions that may arise otherwise : Mine is a popular talk not a technical paper for a learned society of anthropologists but the facts, illustrations and case histories are authentic. The talk will cover, as indicated in the introduction, generally and in broad outline .../-

broad outline a wide field relating to this concept of disease, that is, causes, diagnoses, prognosis, prevention and treatment. Of necessity, I shall mention only principles on various aspects of the subject with a minimum of details. It will be impossible to deal with all aspects. There will be a possibility, therefore, of omitting what to some might appear to be very important aspects. This concept to be described is shared by most African peoples with minor exceptions and variation in practice. Most of the practices to be described with a few exceptions which will be indicated, are among the Xhosa speaking groups among whom I grew and was, in my early part of my life, part of this concept to a varying degree. Even among various African groups there is no intrinsic difference of the concept, the slight differences, if there are, are more of details, language and locality than of fact. The principles and pattern and their elements are the same.

#### NATURE AND CAUSE OF DISEASE:

Africans in their concept of disease include anything that affects the well-being of the individual (Umuntu), the family or homestead (Umzi), tribe (isiswe) and their possessions (Intozabo, Imfuyo). They accept to a limited extent that illness, death, mishaps are possible naturally and as an act of God and nature but that to the largest extent, illness, death, failure, calamities and disasters of all sorts that befall individuals, families, tribes or their animals and fields are due to machinations of ill-disposed or jealous members of the family and/or neighbours through magic and/or through wrath and/or displeasure of the Spirits of the Ancestors (Amathongo, Iminyanya, the Badimo.

#### NATURAL DISEASES:

Africans recognize, as I have indicated, certain natural diseases. These just happen by themselves (ziyazihlela nje) or by the will of God (ngentando ka Tixo)(uJamata). Umkuhlane, slight sickness such as "umfixane", slight head colds are such conditions. It is also known that certain people get upset if they eat certain foods which others eat without ill-effects. Foods in certain state of decomposition or staleness may bring about some untoward symptoms. Certain food intolerance on the part of certain persons is accepted as natural. Although this is the case, it is often adduced that a certain person became ill because he ate food into which a charm (ubuti) or material of sorcery has been maliciously introduced to poison the person concerned. It is said "udhlisiwe" (caused to eat). This is often ascribed to a married woman at the homestead of her husband's people and not at her father's home. This is one way sorcery or witchcraft is alleged to be introduced through food. As a result of the fear of sorcery through this channel Africans as a preventive and precautionary measure share their food from a common dish according to sex, age and/or status. The food is dished up for men, women, boys and for girls and persons of high rank such as Chief and Diviner (Isanuse, Isangoma, Ngaka). Besides the person who has prepared the food or is offering to others must share it with her group or must, in case of beer, squat and taste it or drink it first (ngcamla) publicly in front of the people to whom it is offered and the food or beer thus offered is shared from the same container by all concerned so that no individual becomes a victim. Africans traditionally conscious of the possibility of sorcery did not welcome a special dish prepared behind closed doors. In case of husband and wife, the food was dished up for the husband to eat first and to leave something for the wife to eat after him from the same dish or the husband portioned out a share from the wife to eat at the same dish. Both are exposed to the same possible hazard. Here is perhaps a little bit of an interesting case history. As a young teacher in a country school, I was living with some red people, that is .../-

people, that is unchristian people at Ntibane, Transkei. One afternoon after long waiting after school, I was brought some porridge by an old woman who had an "evil eye" or an eye of displeasure anyway. I ate the porridge and not long after my abdomen swelled and I was most uncomfortable for days after. That weekend, I visited a classificatory Aunt of mine, Magonco, who was reputed for her divining powers by whistle (abemilosi, onomathothole) as well as her ability to cure. She claimed to have acquired her skill and inspiration in her girlhood by living with spirits and animals in the forest and caves who showed her many medicines and how to use them for weeks. During the period, she stated, she was dressed with leaves and ate wild food.

She "smelled out" this woman; but I must confess that I must have given her the lead. Anyway she gave me some medicine crushed and placed in a container from which I drank of the extract. I followed the instructions and became well.

Whether I had, in fact, been given some material of sorcery (ukudliwa) I am not here to say. But, there were the circumstances; I was in an environment where the people believed these things and I was not to be an exception and, therefore, took no chances.

I have unfortunately in this illustration gone far afield into not only causation which I am dealing with at the stage but also to one method of diagnosis and some treatment.

Accidents also are generally accepted as due to natural causes. Sometimes, however, through association of omens and of antecedents with subject evidents as well as the suggestibility of people whose environment is haunted with many unseen evils and spirits in addition to almost a natural doubt of the existence of the law of chance, people under this concept of disease often tend to adduce witchcraft or sorcery as a complicating or aggravating factor to what is otherwise an accident. In fact, one often hears it said, after a car accident where some known person was involved, that there was something behind that accident. It could not just be an accident, some sorcery or witchcraft had played an important part in it. Certain known enemies or suspected enemies are the culprits whom the diviner would sure "smell out" or would be led to smell them out through witch hunting (ukuvumisa) or find them out through bone throwing or by looking at a crystal or a locking glass.

I shall say more of these methods of diagnoses when I deal with that phase of this concept.

Let me digress and mention here that it is believed and even divined at a subsequent consultation that the stirring wheel of a car had been worked or treated (sisetyenziwe) or some material of sorcery had been applied on it or something was dug in and buried under wheel lines at the entrance of the victim's garage.

A case to illustrate this point, Mr X and Mr Y were contestants for the leadership of an African Cricket Association of the region. Mr X was the President and Mr Y was the rival for the position of President. In the environs of this city lived a non-European woman not an African who was reputed for her ability to deal effectively with enemies of her client even to the extent of taking life. Mr Y consulted and instructed her to work (ukusebenza) Mr X's car so that he should meet with an accident and die without reaching Queenstown which was the venue of the tournament. Mr X who was well-known to this woman called on her the next day and tried to persuade her to act in his favour. She told him that it was too late to revoke the spell. In compromise, however, she suggested that either he, Mr X should not attend the tournament or if he does he must go by train and must not drive his car as he must be involved in an accident should he drive.

Mr X, I am told, ..../-

Mr X, I am told, insisted on going by car and driving his own car. He never reached Queenstown. Something went wrong with the car and he was the only one who was killed out of that full car load of persons. My informant of this incident was a very responsible woman, a trained nurse.

Further, Africans generally accept infectious diseases (izifo ezosulelayo) as being due to natural causes and saying every body gets them (Wonkumntu ubanazo). Such diseases have proper African names such as Smallpox (Ingqakaqa), Chickenpox (Irashalala), Whooping Cough (Ityange), Typhus Fever (Ifivemnyama, Umbatalala). This shows that they are fully recognised and no divination is necessary. Sorcery or witchcraft (ubugqwira, ubugqi) is often adduced as an aggravating or complicating factor under certain circumstances. Animal Diseases of epidemic nature like Rinderpest, East Coast, Foot and Mouth Disease, all diseases of cattle and sheep scabs were considered by Africans in earlier days to be due to machinations of European Governments who were alleged to be desirous to decimate the flocks and herds of Africans in order to reduce them to poverty. To justify this apparently untenable suggestion, it used to be asked: Why is it that Magistrates and Native Commissioners know of the disease long before it invades the area and in fact broke out later. It may well be the justification of this view that some European agents of the Government spread diseases somehow and they seem to infect chiefly African flocks and herds and much less the larger European owned herds and flocks. This is the only area of this concept of disease associated with magic that the European, that is, the European Government is 'smelled out'.

#### DISEASES DUE TO SPIRITS OF THE ANCESTORS:

Among Africans the adult heads of families chiefly, although dead, become amathongo and keep in touch with their descendants and relatives in helpful ways unless as a result of failure to perform an expected ritual killing, by disregarding a taboo or by displeasing the Spirits of the Ancestors (amathongo, izinyanya) in any way Africans communicate with the spirits of their ancestors (amathongo) through dreams. Under favourable conditions the Amathongo, Badimo or Izinyanya are protective; only if the ancestors are offended and displeased in one of the many ways mentioned above do they show hostilities. They show hostilities and displeasures by bringing on illness, death, misfortunes and disasters to the person or persons concerned. This may be recognized by the head of the family or it may be brought home to the family's notice as a Witch-doctor diagnoses after divination.

#### MAGIC, WITCHCRAFT AND SORCERY:

Before discussing methods of diagnosis, I propose to deal first with another main cause of disease under this concept - Magic. Under magic we shall deal with witchcraft and sorcery and witches.

I propose here to give some definitions of the words:

"Magic", according to W.H.R. Rivers, "means a group of processes in which man uses rites which depend for their efficacy on his own powers believed to be inherent in or the attributes of certain objects and processes which are used in these rites" and Rivers understands "Religion" as "a group of processes, the efficacy of which depends upon the will of some higher power whose intervention is sought by rites of supplications and propitiation". "Religion", continues Rivers, "differs from magic in that it involves the belief in some power in the universe greater than that of man himself".

#### WITCHCRAFT AND SORCERY AND WITCH AND WITCH-DOCTOR:

The following definitions of these words are found in the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary Volume II for historical reasons.

Witch:

Witch (O.E. Masculine): A man who practises witchcraft or magic. A female magician, sorceress ; in later use, especially a woman supposed to have dealings with the devil or evil spirits and to be able by their co-operation to perform supernatural acts.

Witchcraft: The practice of a witch or witches ; the exercise of supernatural powers supposed to be possessed by persons in league with the devil or evil spirits. Power or influence like that of a magician ; bewitching or fascinating attraction or charm 1599.

Witch-doctor 1/18: One who professes to cure disease and to counteract witchcraft.

(b) A magician among African tribes, especially Kaffirs, whose business it is to detect witches and to counteract the effects of magic 1836.

What is of historical and factual significance is that these words were part of the thoughts and experience of people without regard to primitive peoples in Africa or else where even the definition of witch-doctor as it applies to Africa is in 1836 in the Nineteen Century. This must be taken to mean, as history tells us, that the beliefs in witches and witchcraft or magic are common experience of the human race and not of Africans alone. This again emphasise our common humanity and should imply our common needs and aspirations as human beings.

Sorcery (1) is the use of magic or enchantment ; the practice of magic art ; witchcraft.. Here are meaningful expressions in the same Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, in old English showing how indigenous these ideas and thoughts are:

"(1) By enchantment and sorcery she hath ben the destroyer of many good knyghtes. Malory (2) what drugs, what sorceries ... doe our curious Dames use to inlarge our withered beauties ? 1592".

#### MAGIC, WITCHCRAFT AND SORCERY:

For this popular lecture, I shall not try to make nice distinctions which anthropologists would expect, I shall merely outline how magic, that is witchcraft or sorcery is used to cause disease.

When a person gets ill or something unusual and disastrous happens to one's family or possessions - animals or field it is often inferred that some other person who may be a relative, a neighbour or anybody else who has a grudge or is jealous of anything, is assumed to be responsible for the situation. The intention is either to do harm merely or to kill. The witchcraft may be directed against the head of the house himself or to cause him pain and sorrow to a member of his family, wife or child or his animals or fields.

The ill-disposed person may be herself or himself in possession of witchcraft and sorcery and with a knowledge of how to send a spell. In case one is not a witch or a wizard, one must have bought a charm, ikubalo, from those who know and used it according to directions. Another way is to employ a witch-doctor who is reputed to be able to cast spells and to counteract them as the case may be.

#### " A PLUS" OR "A MINUS":

The spell is effected in one of two way either something is put into the person magically or something which is vital is taken away from the person. The idea is that people get sick because something has been added or put in or something has been removed from the person. Professor Henry E. Sigerist reminds us elsewhere of the old theory of disease being "a Plus" or "a Minus" corresponding to what I have just stated. This idea will emerge and become clearer if we keep it in mind during the course of the talk.

WITCHES OR WIZARDS: Witches or wizards but chiefly women are supposed to possess charm (amakubalo) which have destructive effects or animals or "familiars" which may be used for evil purposes. "Familiars" are animals or "spirits which are supposed to come to a person when called".

These animals .../-

These animals may be sent or used in the casting of evil spells or just the mere sight of them (ukwelama) might lead to severe illness or death if not appropriate treatment is not given in time. Most of these are harmless normally. Because it is often suggested that they are often used for sexual purpose, the 'familiar' are often to be of the opposite sex to the possession. A woman will have male familiars and men female familiars.

Some of the familiars are harmless under ordinary conditions. There are many of them and differ according to tribes but most are common to most of them although they undergo different names on linguistic basis. Some of the more common ones I shall refer to are Tikoloshe (Elf), Icanti (snake), Mfene (Baboon), Izulu or Intsikizi (Hornbill Bird, Heaven Bird) and so forth.

Tikoloshe - U-Hili is a water sprite said to be a strong, short, hairy little being, man-like in form, hardly knee high even when full grown. He ordinarily lives in the river among the reeds and in dongas. He carries a stone as a charm to make himself invisible to ordinary people except young children with whom he loves to play and to adults who possess him. Ordinarily he is harmless plays with children, steals food from huts, makes noises by colliding with furniture and so on. He is said to be sent to an umzi or homestead or if the possessor be a member of the family he may be sent at night to individuals to do some mischief or harm that might cause disease.

Tikoloshe is a "familiar" commonly possessed by women although men are sometimes said to possess it.

Icanti: Another water-sprite, a snake said to be possessed by women is Icanti. It is a snake which changes form and colour under observation. It can change itself to almost anything beautiful and desirable. A person who has seen it (welamile) as I have allured to earlier in this talk becomes speechless or paralysed and may die unless proper treatment is administered promptly.

Mamlambo: Another water-sprite which is generally possessed is Mamlambo (Mother of the River) said to be a charm which is hard like leather and cannot be cut with a knife. The charm is usually by a person who wants to be wealthy. Mine workers have bought it. Like icanti - the kaleidoscopic snake possessed by women, which I have just described, changes itself. It may weight down the container like a suitcase. Other times it turns itself to a beautiful woman. Because of this characteristics some people would rather refer to the Icanti or Mamlambo as one and the same "familiar".

It is said that in course of time Mamlambo wants human being as its victim. If it belongs to a youngman who has parents, it will ask for the parents first saying "Ifuna inyam endala", it wants mature flesh and later it may ask for the possessor family, wife and children. Should the possessor fail to grant its wishes, it kills him. It is claimed that whole families have been destroyed by this "familiar".

Baboon (Mfene): The baboon is a "familiar" said to be possessed by men. Generally it is used for transport; the owner rides it facing backward with one foot on the ground. The mischief it does relates to cattle; it is alleged to milk them at night causing mastitis and/or sores in the teats.

Lightning Bird (Izulu, Impundulu): The bird is supposed to flapping its wings to cause the sound of thunder during lightning. The bird is supposed to dwell beyond the sky. It is generally the possession of women particularly among the south-eastern Africans.

Although no clear description is ever given as to how the Impundulu causes disease or kills a person, it is reputed to be one of the most destructive "familiar" causing miscarriages (ukatywe yimpundulu) kicked by the heaven bird; killing or eating up all the children of its possessor. Childless women, that is those who lose their children through death were suspected to have izulu, impundulu.

Tladi Motoana:

Tladi Motoana (Bird Man): Among Sotho speaking groups there is what is known as Tladi-Motoana when man takes the form of a bird through the use of charms and cause the victim to be struck by lightning. This is supposed to take place in two ways.

(1) The bladder from an ox is filled up with a mixture of appropriate charms and buried in a pit ; at the proper time the charms are manipulated, the name of the victim being called and, it is claimed, the lightning will strike the named victim wherever he or she may be.

(2) Another method described by my informant is as follows: In this case, a human being under magical disguise is to perform the act himself. The victim is within reasonable visible distance. A concoction of charms is mixed with clay with which the actor smears himself to become invisible. He then creates a cloud in which he enters and rides to the place where the victim is. The cloud stops over the hut or where the victim happens to be. The lightning strikes and the victim dies. The actor hurries back to a river where he washes himself to return to his normal visible state.

These things are believed to take place as described but the supposed known incidents are often clothed with the fertility of imagination of the narrator.

Having dealt all too briefly about some "familiar" and the part they play in the cause of disease and death, I must deal now equally briefly with another aspect of magic in the causation of disease, that is, the use of charms, spells and rites to bring about harm or death to enemies or other victims. In this aspect, there is no need for one to come in contact physically with the victim. The spell may and can be cast or sent in one of many ways through what J.G. Frazer called Sympathetic Magic. There are two types of Sympathetic Magic - imitative or mimetic and contagious magic. In both types harm or injury need not be done directly on the victim but to something which is part of him, belongs to him, was associated with him or something which symbolizes him and he thus suffers by sympathy. In imitative or mimetic magic the sorcerer, witch or the agent of the aggrieved person may draw an image of the victim or make his effigy. By doing this, he conjures the victim and now having a hold on him he simulates on the image, effigy or part of the victim the type of harm or injury desired. He might burn it, stick a pin through its heart or damage it in some other way. The victim wherever he or she may be falls sick or probably dies.

"Imitative magic is universal and timeless". Today, even among the more technologically advanced peoples pictures are still stuck with pins as an act of revenge, they are burnt and torn to pieces in the hope that harm will be done to the victim. Africans therefore, are doing what others have done and still do. In the African's concept of disease, one's photograph could expose one to danger of magic and the reluctance to have one made could be understood. Even a full name, written down on anything may expose its owner to the dangers of sympathetic imitative magic. Shadows and anything that identifies the victim may be sufficient for purposes of imitative magic.

TAKEN FROM (UKUTHATELWA):

Parts of a person's or victim's body such as nail pairings, clippings of his hair, tooth, excretions such urine, perspiration, excrement, spittle, even objects that he has touched or having been in contact with him such as his home, his food, his clothing, his foot prints, his perspiration or dirt in his washing water may be treated magically and the victim becomes affected sympathetically. This type of magic which deals with products of a victim's body are what J.G. Frazer referred to as Contagious Magic. As a result of confirmed belief among Africans about the efficacy of this method of casting spells people were very careful about the disposal of products of their bodies, hair clippings, nail pairings were burnt or buried and one's personal belongings were always kept out of reach of suspected persons.

Cases of madness were often said to have followed the malicious clipping of a victim's hair. Many young women have associated the coming on with the mysterious disappearance and loss of used sanitary towels or any piece of under wear or night wear that was in use during menstruation. People who are the victims of this form of magic are said to be Thatelwe (taken from) and the hope of recovery depends upon recovery of the lost material and treating it or sending a counter spell to destroy the effect.

UKUBEKELWA (SOMETHING PUT IN FOR): Sometimes, something, material of magic may be buried at door steps, garage entrances or anywhere the victim is wont to frequent and may be and on anything the victim uses habitually. To avoid harming others the casting of the spell is associated with calling the name of the victim and others may step over or on the material for magic with impunity. This form of casting a spell is ukubekela.

MADE TO EAT (UKUDLISWA): Another method of sorcery or causing disease which is different from those I have just described under sympathetic magic is ukudliwa (made to eat). It is a form of poisoning. In this case there must be direct contact with the victim. The charm is surreptitious or maliciously mixed with or introduced into the food. The victim unsuspecting takes the food and he takes ill.

DIAGNOSIS: A person is ill and the people are satisfied that what he or she suffers from is not an ordinary illness. It is not an act of God ; something has been done by someone and so far as they are concerned it is something beyond their knowledge and ability. It is, therefore, decided to consult a person who should know - Witch-doctor, a medicine man or diviner to make the diagnosis. An important distinction must be made here.

The priest diviners, in isi-Xosa, amagqira are of various grades. They include (1) Isamuse, the Chief Priest Diviner

(2) Amakukuzana are the most numerous class of priest diviners or ordinary amagqira. They are divided into

(a) Amagqira Aqubulayo which means priest diviner who "specialize in extracting some supposed deleterious matter from an affected part of the patient's body. This implies that Africans believe in object intrusion as a cause of illness, the "a Plus" concept of cause of disease I referred to earlier. Ukuqubula means to come upon suddenly. The other section of amakukuzana - priest diviners are

(b) Amagqira Ambululayo - Revealers or Producers of Charms.

(3) Awemilosi - Whistlers - The spirits are supposed to convey the diagnosis to them through whistles. If one, however, watches the diviner closely it is possible to discover that the diviner is simply a ventriloquist.

Charlatanism and chicanery are not unknown among diviners ; but which trade or profession that does not have "tricks of the trade"? It seems to be a human failing which does not seem to fail among all peoples in all stages of development and in all callings.

There are also Rain-makers - aweMvula, ama-Tola - War priest and Herbalists - amakwele.

DIVINATION: The people concerned with illness take their sticks and go to consult an Isamuse, Isangoma, Umngoma and Ngaka which are linguistic names of diviners among South African tribes.

Divination is done in two ways - one way is known as "ukuyumisa" (to agree or to consent). During the incantations and efforts to discover the witch (igqwira) who is the cause of the trouble prances around tries to put on his most serious and frightful looks exclaiming kwé and then "Yumani" (agree) and the company which came to find out who caused the trouble replies, "Siyavuma". This continues with the diviners mentioning different things as the reasons why the people came to him. If the response is not enthusiastic he says he was just joking. When he says something ..../-



something nearer to the suspect the response becomes louder and if the suspect is one of the company the behaviour of members of the company betrays who she or he is. This method of divination is accompanied by clapping of hands. There is another method similar to the one just described except that it is accompanied by singing.

**BONE THROWING (UKUPOSA amathambo):** In this method the Ngaka tries to discover the cause of the trouble by the position and relations of the bones. He has an animal skin bag containing bones of various shapes belonging to different parts of animal skeleton. Each bone symbolizes something such as Chief, man, woman, child and so forth. The bag is handed over to the person who desires the diagnosis; he or she must shake them asking them to show where the trouble lies and often appealing to the family spirits to assist and then throws them down. The Ngaka reads and interprets the signs from the position and relations of the bones as I have already described and at the same time asking person enquiring to agree or disagree. The interpretations are influenced and guided by the response. The more enthusiastic and assenting the response to questions and suggestions the more vigorously and adroitly the Ngaka follows his lead.

**TREATMENT:** The diagnosis of the cause of the trouble or the disease being found the next logical step is to remove the cause and prevent the recurrence of the condition in future. The present case must be cured and the person, the homestead (Umzi, Motse) or fields (amasimi) must be protected and immunized against similar troubles in future.

**Preventive or Protective treatment:** Africans under their traditional concept of disease believed strongly in preventive, protective or prophylactic treatment against the danger he knows or believes to exist and to be responsible for disease, death and other disasters. As I indicated, it is believed that the hostile forces against the community and its individual members are due

- (a) to the wrath of the spirits of the ancestors and
- (b) the machinations and magic of fellowmen, members of the family, neighbours and other enemies.

**OFFERINGS TO THE SPIRITS:** It was customary and still is among many Africans to-day in rural areas untouched by missionaries or influences of the West still follow strictly certain customs and traditions of the respective families at birth, initiation, marriage or death as special offering to the spirits of the ancestors (amathongo, Iminyanya). Suitable animals for the occasion are slaughtered and beer is brewed and a special offering is made to the spirits of the ancestor by the head of the family or if deceased by his eldest son or any appropriate person for the time being. It is hoped thus to prevent the wrath and displeasure of the Amadhlozi, Iminyanya, or Badimo.

**THE INDIVIDUAL:** The protection of the individual is effected in various ways. One way is to follow tradition and custom as stated just now for the pleasure and the satisfaction of Iminyanya. This is the religious and spiritual aspect of the protection. The other way which is complementary to the one I have just described is to give the individual medicinal protection by inoculating or immunising one with protecting mixtures, of charms powdered or on an oily base. One is scarified on certain parts of the body which differ according to the notions of the Sqira (Doctor) or the medicine is carried as an amulet. There are also antidotes which are carried to be smeared or chewed under certain suspicious circumstances and surroundings. This process is known as strengthening the individual - ukuqinisa (to make strong).

**COUNTER MAGIC:** Since illness is believed to be caused by magic, it is only logical to conclude that it must be prevented by counter magic. The African who still believes in this concept of disease has, as I have already shown, devised measures to protect one against magic. Folk lore and beliefs of the people have come to recognize many objects to contain .../-

to contain magic properties. They are used or worn to repel "black magic".

FETISHES, AMULETS AND TALISMAN: Individuals may possess a fetish, an amulet or a talisman. The fetish is an object that is the seat of magic power. It may be something in which a spirit resides. Almost any object may be made a fetish through being charged with magic powers by a medicine man. It may be used for good or for evil.

An amulet, like a fetish, is an object that possesses magic powers or properties but unlike the fetish which is used for good or evil, an amulet is for one purpose only to ward off evil, to catch and neutralize black magic directed towards the wearer of the amulet. Amulets of all kinds are worn by some of the Africans who hold this concept of disease - that disease is due largely to magic and witchcraft. But what we must remember here is that the use of amulets is not limited to Africans or so-called primitive societies. It is found all over the world even among the so-called advanced and enlightened Western peoples; many persons wear some kind of amulet.

Besides amulets some people wear an object which has magic properties, the Talisman. It is worn not to ward off evil like the amulet and is intended to bring luck. Africans who believe in this concept of disease have charms used and worn as talisman. Westerners with all their enlightenment also wear talisman. How about that rabbit foot in Dr So and So's overcoat. There is a horse shoe over the door entrance of that ultra modern two storey mansions. That football team flies with its mascot Tom, the black and white cat. Oh! just for luck you will say and the African applauds heartily with full understanding and appreciation of our common humanity.

FIXING THE HOMESTEAD: It is customary under this concept of disease to protect the homestead (Umzi) or to fix the homestead (ukulungisa Umzi) as the expression goes. This is done by a witch-doctor to protect inmates of the umzi and their livestock. Pegs that have been touched with charms that can counter the effects of black magic or witchcraft and might even help to catch the witches and wizards. The pegs are fetishes with magic properties to repel evil. They are placed in four corners around the homestead and at points around the cattle kraal as well.

PROTECTION AGAINST LIGHTNING:

Other special protection of the homestead is against lightning. This is done by a "heaven doctor" or lightning doctor. One of the pegs is placed on the top centre of the house and others surround the house appropriately.

TREATMENT: When the diagnosis of the cause of the disaster has been made, treatment takes according to the cause of the disaster, sickness or death. If the cause is the displeasure of the spirits of the ancestors, the carrying out proprietary offering is carried out by the head of the family. If, however, the sickness of one is chronic, associated with dreams and frequent communication with the spirit of the Ancestors live to what is called "Mkatazo" "trouble" or ukutwasa - to come forth - meaning that one is destined to become a witch-doctor or witch-doctoress, proper sacrifices are made and the novitiate or neophyte is handed over to a Isanuse to undergo the long training.

In the case of the individual appropriate treatment is done to remove the spell and the individual is fortified against future attacks. The witch or igqwira who has been smelled out is told to release the victim and after going through an ordeal to prove his innocence or otherwise the customary punishment is meted out.

In case lightning has struck a hut or huts, a lightning doctor is called - the people undergo a purifying treatment and afterwards all concerned are fortified against being struck by lightning in future.

In short the principle of treatment is to remove the cause, treat the patient or umzi and give protective treatment for the future.

THE EFFECT OF THE CONCEPT:

THE EFFECT OF THE CONCEPT: Some may ask what effect did this concept have on the community? It had a good and bad effect. It integrated that kind of society. People were unified by their beliefs. It, however, had unfavourable effect; it tended to discourage initiation and progress as success or prosperity was presumed to be due to use of magic and aroused jealousy and hostility against the suspected person. On the other hand one is inclined to feel that this concept had some psychological benefits especially in its psycho-analysis during diagnosis and treatment. There are aspects of it which are good group therapy.

Although aspects of it in theory must seem stupid and foolish, no one can deny that it is very logical within its framework of thought and interpretation of phenomenon. Even its vague theories of disease are not far removed from the old humoral theory of disease.

"The theory that the body contains four humours, blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile, a right proportion or the mixing of which constitute health, improper proportion or irregular distribution of which constitutes disease".

John Brown 1735-1788 said "that diseases are due to an excess or lack of stimulus."

No doubt our medical concept of disease, its diagnosis and treatment is becoming more precise with the advance of science but we have to admit that our notions or concept of the causes and treatment of many diseases is still no much better than magic especially when we deal with mental cases but the diseases improve all the same.

Three days ago, I saw in the Johannesburg Daily Newspaper, the Star, that "Nurses discuss Bantu Culture". Nurses will spend five days discussing Bantu Culture and its relation to the training of Native Nurses". This statement has helped me in the development of this talk. I have tried as you must have not recognized, to endeavour to bring out the similarities in certain stages of development of the more technological advanced Westerners. They also have known and believed in witches and witchcraft. They have believed in "possessions, demoniacal and other" according to Professor T.K. Gesterreich. Their modern medicine has emerged from these depths of mysticism and magic.

I did this as stated at the beginning to show that the concept of disease I have been describing is a changing concept. It is by no means any more universal among Africans today. There are many Africans in the towns who are as vague in their appreciation of it as most of the Europeans. Even in rural areas there are Africans, Africans, Christian Africans who have never followed any of the practices I have described as being the "African Concept of Disease". For more Africans in rural areas this concept still is; for many in urban areas, the concept was and is unknown or vaguely known by some. For most of the candidates that come to you for nursing training this concept is an intellectual curiosity and does not in any way influence their progress. They may have difficulties of rural persons of all groups when they came to town. The very fact that your hospitals are always overflowing with African patients, is an indication that this concept is fast dying among Africans. But for the system of the proposed Bantu Education, it would disappear faster with a system of compulsory education and scientific training for Africans.

I hope the nursing profession will not be tempted to presume the need of a special type of training for African girls. There is neither scientific nor historical basis for it. The Western peoples went through these beliefs but were emancipated by scientific and technological knowledge. The Africans are doing the same. Some of us have gone through its influence but it did not handicap us in our training. The nursing profession of South Africa must not sacrifice its high professional and ethical standards for political ideologies. Nursing is a profession of civilised people with high and noble ideals all over the world.

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