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Medicine Magic And Religion Of The Lovedu

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patient is too ill to want to move, the sick-room is the kitchen hut where the evening meal is cooked, and it is generally foul with smoke and full of people. A patient suffering from a bad cough is given a potsherd of sand to spit into. If at all possible, a patient goes outside to relieve himself and we have seen people with a high temperature struggling to go out in the wind and rain; but if he is too weak to walk, a broken pot is provided as a commode. Very sick people are given soft porridge without meat or relish and great pains are always taken to persuade patients to eat lest they lose strength and waste away.

The treatment in diseases such as small-pox, measles and chicken-pox, which one generally gets once only, is peculiar and shows how values and procedures used in other spheres of culture may become interwoven with medical practices. The illness is dealt with as if it were a stage in life like puberty or circumcision. When the first symptoms appear, the patient is isolated and a stick, placed across the doorway of the hut, warns people off. Not only will muridi aggravate the illness if the patient comes into contact with certain people, but it is recognised that the illness is contagious. From the third day when the rash or spots appear they have each day to be scraped with bark of the mutsere (Bridelia sp.) which has been bruised and left in water, the object being to cause all the matter in the spots or postules to come out and prevent the postules from going deeply into the endodermis this leaving pock marks and scars. The process is said to be very painful, much blood also coming out, but it is in keeping with the general medical practice of cleaning out all matter daily from festering sores. The 'dirt' is buried at the

cross-roads. The treatment is continued daily till there is no more white matter; then the patient is smeared with red ochre and fat (in the same way as an initiate) and allowed to come out whether he is still ill or not. The treatment is called hu ebs, the term used for going through the circumcision initiation. It is of interest that the Lovedu regard the early stage, until the formation of scabs as the only contagious period. In fact, this is the most contagious period but the contagion continues for a much longer time. Nothing is done by the Lovedu for the purification of the isolation hut which must be a source of great infection.

Disease and healing are in the last resort connected with the guardianship of the ancestors. If they are annoyed and relax their vigilance, their descendants may be rendered susceptible to disease, or medicines used cannot have their full effect. Ancestors, however do not merely ward off disease or assist its cure; they also actively cause illness. The crying all day of a baby may be due to the spirit of a grandfather pinching it in order that it be given his name; sore eyes in children are often, and in adults sometimes, attributed to ancestors. Sometimes they seize the whole body of a person because they wish to 'possess' him, and barrenness or difficult birth may be laid at their door. Philip's mother was childless, her children all dying in infancy till it was discovered that her father's father was complaining. A goat was killed at the grave of the complaining ancestor, the meat being eaten without salt and the bones buried in the grave, and a libation of beer was poured. Thereafter a son was born; he lived and grew up, his mother's only child. But ancestors never cause death: even if at first an illness is said to

be due to them, should death supervene, it is attributed to witches. Complaints of living relatives, especially of the father's sister may also cause illness. These are called mahava.

By far the most important of all causes of ill-health, however, is the evil work of witches and sorcerers. Certain illnesses, such as Mhilese, are characteristic of sorcery and can be contracted in no other manner. But any disease may be caused by witchcraft and witches may avail themselves of the opportunity offered by any minor illness to enter and aggravate it. Diagnosis depends on the course of the illness. Dysentery is regarded as due to natural causes; but, should it not respond to treatment or should the patient suspect an enemy, a witch will be implicated. During the 1938 small-pox epidemic the head of a district which was more hardly hit then its neighbours, called a meeting of residents. Men declared, 'Smallpox kills people here; they merely get ill and recover elsewhere. There is a witch in our midst.' Money was collected, three men sent to a diviner and, in the end, two women were accused.

Ritual defilement and sex relations in certain circumstances as a specialised cause of disease have already been discussed. There is, however, another cause special to primitive peoples, namely, vengeance magic. If someone has stolen anything belonging to you it is possible to call in a doctor to doba the thief, by working with medicine on the spot whence the goods have been stolen. Within a short time the finger of the thief begins to itch; so bad does this become that he has no respite and may even in desperation put it into the fire. Nothing will cure the sore till

the thief confesses and the owner of the goods, taking some of the same medicine on the end of a piece of grass, lights it and waves the flame (hu vonekela) over the finger. A woman who came to us for treatment had a very swollen wrist and hand and what looked like a cut down the length of her little finger. She said it had been caused by a thorn but others said she had been dɔba'd and must have stolen something.

It is believed to be possible so to dɔba one's cattle and goats that if one is stolen and killed it will bleat in the stomach of anyone eating the meat, thus proclaiming his guilt. An interesting case of compulsion neurosis in which such bleating actually took place came to our notice. A young man otherwise normal would for days at a time make sounds with his mouth like the bleating of a goat. Everyone of course said he was a terrible thief and 'finished people's goats. Later he gave up the bleating and would utter his sister's name, Magoma, looking up to the sky as he did so in the same way as he had previously bleated.

It must not be imagined that the Lovedu do not recognise a large number of diseases as natural. Many illnesses 'just come'. Such are all minor ailments like coughs, colds, stomach disorders, and also other more serious diseases like dysentery and malaria. Malaria is stated to result from drinking murula cider down in the valleys (from which one generally returns home after dark), eating watermelons or drinking water in the valleys or walking in the dew in the cool early morning air, all of which are in fact liable to bring on an attack to people suffering from chronic malaria, as do 90% of the population. The idea that a mosquito is responsible is treated with scorn. Too much beer is known to affect the stomach,

many kinds of spinach to dause diarrhoea.

Epidemics of smallpox, measles, coughs are thought to be brought by 'wind'(phefo): phefo e dile (a wind has come), it is said and steps may be taken to combat the epidemic by sprinkling the inmates of the village. Usually such epidemic 'just comes' but on occasion one hears that a witch has 'sent' the wind. Ancestors, too, are thought to exercise some controlling influence over 'wind'; in most libations they are asked, 'Prevent for us these winds', that is, as we might phrase it in our prayers, guard us from disease. Diseases are never classified as natural or non-natural solely according to their nature or symptoms. Any natural illness may also be 'sent' and, though natural death is recognised as possible, in practice those closely affected always attribute death to witchcraft or sorcery, though outsiders may give other reasons. Of the thirty deaths including those of a number of old people, that came to our notice none, however, were thought to be natural.

Contagiousness (hu fadela)of certain diseases such as venereal disease, leprosy, whooping cough, measles, is recognised and it is known that consumption may be transmitted by parents to their children, as one of its names, lehɔtɔla la tate-mulɔgɔ (cough of the family father) signifies. When anyone dies of consumption, people dislike using his clothes for fear of contracting the disease. But there is no idea that contacts like drinking from the same cup as the affected person could cause the disease, except in the case of leprosy, and no precautions are taken to prevent them. The moon, like certain kinds of ritual defilement, is thought to aggravate certain kinds of disease. Epileptic fits which are common in

the society are believed to come on chiefly when the moon is in its last quarter and in curing this disease care is always taken to treat it when the moon is new. Madness (khiphɛgo)is also believed to wax and wane with the moon. When the horns of the moon point down as they appear to do during most of the summer months when disease is rife, it is said to 'pour out disease' (shulla vulwɛdɛ); when they point up, the moon is said to be 'holding' or withholding disease (hu khuba malwɛdɛ). But there is no serious belief in this.

CHAPTER 3

DOCTORS, DIVINERS AND THEIR WORK.

Kinds of Doctors.

There must, of course, be a body of professional men and women trained in and practising the art and science of medicine, but besides these there are many who have an extensive knowledge of home remedies. This is not unexpected in a society in which ordinary mortals live close to, and know a great deal about, nature. Everyone is familiar with plants and their properties which is one of the bases of pharmacology, with the meagre conceptions of anatomy and physiological relations and much of the intricate system of causation of disease. But there are also many men and women who know some special medicines or types of treatment, inherited usually from father mother or spouse, and kept secret, not because the knowledge is a source of material benefit, for the remedies are usually given free, but because it lends recognition and prestige. Mamutho, despite all our efforts divulged her medicine for inflamed eyes only as a parting gift. This unwillingness to impart medical knowledge is accepted and well understood: *go vunaga vya hwe* (it is his doctorhood), they say. Madinji treats sprains and fractures; Khiebe specialises in mutual inoculation of the newly-wed; Khabani knows roots for dysentery and Nagambi treats cattle diseases. These are herbalists, not doctors; but some herbalists are so well-known for the efficacy of a medicine they have that even diviners send

patients to them.

Knowledge of these remedies, however important, does not make one a doctor (ŋaga); that appellation is accorded only to initiated bone-throwers and those herbalists who have achieved general recognition as dispensers of many medicines and treatments or who cure such difficult diseases as epileptic fits. Muhale's wife, though no bone-thrower is recognised as a ŋaga: she is a good mid-wife, cures a number of children's ailments and expertly wields a blood-letting awl. But a herbalist, even if called ŋaga, remains ŋaga-tshuhya, a doctor without horns (power), because he does not divine; he can prescribe for recognised diseases, but he cannot diagnose in other cases for which the divining dice are necessary. From our point of view the herbalist diagnoses and prescribes along more or less scientific lines; to the native he is a novice, unable to deal with witches or the more serious diseases. It is of interest to note that there is a distinct separation of medicine and surgery. On the whole it is the herbalist and uninitiated who do vein-cutting and blood-letting; and diviners, even in scarification usually require some uninitiated person or member of the family to make the cuts.

The distinctive characteristic of the doctor with 'power' is that he is a diviner. That must necessarily be so in a society in which pathology is the science of diseases, the nature and causes of which lie so largely in magico-witchcraft conceptions. Special techniques are called for in place of what we call diagnosis and bedside manner. The diviner's function is, however, more than that: he must be called in about the details of every

religious ceremony to discover the wishes of the ancestors; he decides where, in order to avoid the danger of the witch, every village must be built; he makes the witch-proof fence.

Besides the bone-thrower, to whom we shall refer as doctor and who is consulted at every turn, there are two other classes of diviner, the lelɔpɔ doctor and the mugome, both foreign introductions from the east. The lelɔpɔ doctor is usually a tribesman, the mugome always a Shangana-Tonga preferably living outside Vhulovedu. The spheres of these classes of diviner are different: the doctor heals disease and is the general medical practitioner in the wide Lovedu sense; the lelɔpɔ doctor, almost always a woman, initiates people into the cult of possession by spirits and often is also a general practitioner, divining with bones and healing disease, especially barrenness and ailments of children; and the mugome is the forensic physician, the final court of appeal in cases of witchcraft and sometimes seduction and theft which fall beyond the powers of ordinary courts of law. If he is famous, he keeps no medicines, though otherwise he combines smelling-out of the guilty with a general medical practice. Both mugome and lelɔpɔ doctor claim direct inspiration from the ancestors, but the doctor reads his bones by rule.

Every mugome has his shrine, usually at the foot of a murula tree (Sclerocarrya caffra) where he prays for help and lays every-he receives as payment: if you pay him a shilling he will never put it away before having laid it with a few generous pinches of snuff on the shrine and telling the ancestors what he has earned; if he uses a goat its horns decorate the tree. The lelɔpɔ doctor

who works chiefly when possessed by her spirit will not use a goat in curing without first having set aside small pieces of the meat for the spirits (a curious case of a spirit offering to spirits, for she is possessed at the time!) In the case of the bone-thrower, however, the connection with the ancestors is not nearly so direct. When about to divine he does not ask the ancestors for help but bids the bones 'tell him truly'.

Some doctors have a shrine: Mpoteni's is a long stick of khirala on which he hangs his medicine bags and places horns of goats earned in his profession; Magwela when divining once asked his clients (Christians who had asked for medicine only, not bones) for a shilling 'just to suma my gods'; but many, like Khidima never pray and have no shrine. Yet in the long run the spirits control the success of doctors just as they do most undertakings. After Magwela had finished his training, his father poured a libation asking the gods to make him successful in his profession. And once when a doctor whose clientele had fallen off considerably asked a friend to divine the cause, he was told that his sister was to pour a libation on beads belonging to his mother's side of the family (from whom he had inherited his profession) as well as burn some luck medicine (leshwaba).

Training of doctor and diviner.

As it is difficult to persuade outsiders to part with their knowledge, the profession of doctor, in theory open to all, is in practice more often than not handed down in the family from father to son or daughter, maternal uncle to nephew, husband to wife or even wife to husband. Interest and inclination determine who the pupil will be: Boromo, for example, though not the eldest child

was the one who, from his boyhood, used to accompany his father when he collected medicines and early acquired a good knowledge of herbs and treatments; in Mpoteni's family all three sons have become doctors. To acquire a working knowledge of the bones, with which people are generally familiar to a small extent may take only a few months; but it is useless knowledge unless one has medicines and experience which may take years to acquire. Ambitious doctors spend their lives gaining these perquisites, buying from one, begging from another, colleague; many travel from tribe to tribe or go periodically to Johannesburg where good money is to be made.

There are many specialists: Ramavulana, like his father before him, is a noted rain-maker; Mambye is a master of madabi by which he changes people into animals or hangs organs of the victim of his vengeance magic on pegs in the hut; Mashao makes the fence of the vyali lodge witch-proof; Rathavala strengthens the queen for office; Mulebye 'doctors' the boys' circumcision lodge. A doctor who has not inherited, cannot easily acquire, such specialised knowledge: the price is high and the secrets not easily given away. The greatest doctors are said to use human remains in their most potent medicines, and to satisfy this need there are zwigevevhwa, murderers who waylay and kill people at night. During our stay people, even at public gatherings, discussed and warned against the activities and haunts of these murderers. That they constitute a real menace to safety is shown by the murders that do at times occur, when it is usually almost impossible for the administration to find the culprit.

Dr Thagu's wife one night came home very drunk and next morning discovered part of her genitals excised. She accused her husband in the court of the head of the district (where we also happened to be staying at the time) and, though he denied the crime, he paid the fine, one beast and one donkey to his wife's people and one goat for the court.

A good doctor, unless, as is most common, he grows up in the profession, undergoes a long period of ad hoc training, of 'walking about' with doctors. Maderabani, who hoped by becoming a doctor to save his family the expense of constantly calling in medical aid, began by going about with doctors he knew, from time to time persuading them to show him a few medicines; he put his knowledge to successful use in his family and started collecting a set of bones, buying those he could not pick up himself. Gradually he acquired the elements of divining, finishing up his training at the feet of a Shangana-Tonga mugome.

Tuition in divining teaches one the various combinations of the dice; really to 'know' the bones one must drink their soup in a ceremony called 'cooking the bones'. It is the only cooking the dice undergo, so it is taboo to use bones that have been cooked as food; this cooking completes a diviner's training and it not only creates a bond between dice and diviner but gives him insight to see what is obscure to others. There is nothing to prevent a man from practising long before he has completed his training. Anybody who claims to know a cure or throw the dice will always find people willing to be helped and it is said some doctors gain experience in far-away tribes before completing their

initiation, handing over to their master half of what they earn.

The ceremony of 'cooking the bones' varies from doctor to doctor but consists in essence of three main features. Firstly a young cockerel or, according to older custom, a goat is killed, its flesh is cooked with the dice of the novitiate and its broth drunk by him. The cock quickens the perception of both bones and diviner, for it heralds the dawn before man perceives its approach. Secondly, the novice is given medicine (by inoculation or as a drink) containing inter alia the heart and nose of the vulture or wild dog so that he may sense things from afar. And thirdly the bones are buried overnight at the cross-roads where many people walk, to become associated with people in general and 'to gather the news'.

Magwale, whose own father felt too old to undertake his son's initiation himself, went to a friend skilled in this treatment and was told to bring with him a fowl and the heart and nose of the wild dog and vulture. He had difficulty in finding the latter so the doctor instructed him to leavethem out as he had himself already acquired these medicines. On his arrival, the fowl, a young cockerel just beginning to crow (a young hen just beginning to lay would also do) was killed and put with his dice in a pot to cook. The heart and an organ called khikwakwe of the fowl were then mixed with some powder containing the heart and nose of the vulture and wild dog and given him to eat (Mpoteni was made to eat this meat off the end of a stick so as not to touch it with his hands). When the bones and meat had cooked for some time, Magwale had to drink the gravy so that he might 'know the bones'.

That night the dice were buried at the cross-roads without medicine, to 'gather the words of people' (hu uqwa mafogo). Early next morning the doctor and Magwale went to unearth the bones, taking out two male bones of the set (to represent themselves) but leaving the rest. Beer had been made to attract people to the village; when a woman passed over the bones a female bone would be taken out, when a child passed one representing a child would be taken and so on, without any reference to their totems. Those bones in the set which do not go in pairs, such as the phalanx of the lion or the malobe may be taken out at any time.

At about midday when this process had been completed, the dice were placed with bruised roots and beer in a flat, wooden bowl. First the doctor himself drank a little (according to etiquette, as it was beer), next his colleague who was present drank and lastly Magwale sipped some of the mixture without touching the bowl. Now to give him confidence he was made to stand a little way off and asked to guess in what position the dice fell when cast by the doctor (the main position is determined by the four chief dice which may fall in sixteen different positions) Three times he was asked and each time he was correct, a clear indication of the potency of the medicine! Magwale still remembers the positions on that momentous day and states that he could not possibly know the positions without seeing them today, for the potency of the medicine has worn off a little. On leaving for home he was given a powder to snuff and some to eat in soft porridge made with medicinal roots morning and evening for three days. These were to make him dream and know things .

Different doctors have their own ways of initiation though all conform to the general pattern. Adam, for example, instead of drinking medicine had a mixture of spleen of hyena, nose of the wild dog and heart and tongue of the vulture inserted in a scarification made in the tip of his tongue, and instead of burying the bones, he and his teacher slept at the cross-roads; he repeated the crowing of the first cock, and was given medicine containing some soil from this spot to drink in order that his home would be like the cross-roads, a meeting-place of many clients Mpoteni had both a fowl and a goat used in his treatment and had to eat the foam of a frothy medicine morning and evening.

Possession in the ordinary manner of the cult but by a spirit who in life was a doctor, constitutes the initiation of a lelɔpɔ doctor. There are people, however, possessed by such diviner-spirits who have not become doctors. A lelɔpɔ doctor may divine during possession when the possessing spirit speaks or chants, or he may throw the dice when not possessed, like an ordinary doctor. If, during possession, the dice are thrown, it is merely for effect, for they are hardly looked at. It is claimed that lelɔpɔ doctors read dice without training, being guided by their spirit; but in practice we found that either they had for months attached themselves to another lelɔpɔ doctor, or, as members of a divining family, had become familiar with the bones prior to possession. Matherisano, who was so renowned a doctor that the village she lived in went by her name, not her husband's, said that after her initiation into the cult, her mother's father, the spirit that manifested himself in her, would come to her at night in her dreams

digging iron in hand, telling her which medicines to use. So vividly did she dream that she used on waking to go outside to see if anyone was there. After having attached herself for eight months to a lelɔpa doctor she paid her two head of cattle and began practising herself.

The mugɔme, like the lelɔpa doctor, is guided by a spirit which manifests its desire that he should become a diviner by making him ill, but unlike the lelɔpa doctor he is not actually possessed. The mugɔme is the master diviner; but in fact he seldom throws the dice more than once or twice before proceeding to divine 'by the heart'. If his dice are not handy a mugɔme may even use mealie pips for divining and we have ourselves seen one whose whole set consisted solely of lion phalanx bones. His initiation comprises the curing of his illness, apprenticeship to another mugɔme and the 'cooking of the bones'. If, ~~therefore~~ however, he does not wish to become a mugɔme it is possible to 'chase out' the troublesome spirit by rubbing (hu fɔfola) the whole body with charms so that they become mixed with body dirt, all of which is buried in a wet place which must then be squirted with water (hu phasa) containing medicines which cause the spirit to forget.

The mugɔme a% Mavulana traces the appearance of his abiding spirit to a mine trolley accident in Johannesburg. He had seen his mother's brother in a dream bidding him to return home and when the accident happened he knew why it had befallen him. In hospital where he lay for six months he was overcome by so strong a longing for home that he felt it must be the spirit again trou-

bling him. On returning home he was not will so he went to a lelɔpɔ doctor who cured him by initiation to cause the manifestation of the spirit. Now he began to dream about divining. His spirit took him to a big pool in the Mulodozi river which he entered to find a small river stone. This became the basis of a divining set which he began collecting. He claims that from this time, guided by his spirit, he began being a mugɔmɔ without having had any tuition; but not only do we know that other megɔmɔ have undergone a long period of training, but we have seen such disciples walking about with master megɔmɔ, helping them in 'smelling out'. Some megɔmɔ dance at night in a manner similar to possessed people (this dance is called majɔmane) but many do not. Megɔmɔ resemble lelɔpɔ doctors in being guided by a spirit and sometimes even have a similar initiation, but their function and manner of procedure are altogether different, as we shall see.

Divination.

The divinatory dice constitute the great diagnostic device. These dice are, as we have seen, closely associated with their owner who has drunk of their soup, and before a doctor can use the set of another, even if it was his father, it must be placed in medicine to be given 'power' to go over to the new man. When a new bone is added to an existing set it is smeared with medicine (excreta of the hyena and tongue and heart of the vulture) The dice khuma and become unable to divine unless 'washed' each month by being left overnight in water containing medicine- usually mupada bark (Lonchocarpus capassa), and laid out to dry in the sun next morning. They become defiled and have to be

washed also after having been touched by a person coming to divine about a death and it is quite common for a doctor to send away a client with the words, 'The bones have not been washed.' On one occasion when the dice gave no satisfactory answers a doctor attributed this to makhuma owing to the fact that the clients had not yet held the khitshila (removal of defilement of death) for a child who had died some months previously.

The Lovedu set is fairly stereotyped, consisting of about forty pieces, most but not all of which are bones. The bones and hakati (oval-shaped stones of a fruit) of the Shangana-Tonga mugome are somewhat different but are subject to similar rules of interpretation. Dominating the usual Lovedu set are four flat pieces of ivory or bone, two male and two female. The largest male bone, called lehwane, represents a full-grown man, the smaller, khilome, a bachelor or boy; the large female, distinguished from the male bones by being deeply notched at one end is called twadima and represents a married or important woman, the smaller being thowana, a young girl. One side of each bone is distinguished by black dots or rings, often made with a poker; when such bone falls with its 'eyes' up (showing), it means happiness, while 'eyes' down denotes anger. Nowadays dominoes are often used instead of ivory or bone. These four ivory dice fall in sixteen different combinations, the cardinal positions. Each position has its own name and its own praise, referring, though vaguely, to its meaning; and it is these four pieces from which the general configuration of influences or prognostications is read. There are other sets of four: pieces from

the ventral surface of a tortoise each with two easily distinguishable sides, and shells, two Oliva standing for males and two Cypraea representing females. The tortoise shells (kudu) are associated more especially with illness, the shells with the weather.

Having thrown the dice, the diviner looks first at the ivory pieces and gives the praise of their disposition which indicates the general situation, say, dissension, loss or complaints of the father's sister. But this general situation must be related to the lie of certain other bones, particularly malope, the knuckle-bone of the steenbuck (Raphiceros campestus) from which as chief of all the bones the diviner next orientates the situation. The procedure thereafter involves linking this situation on the one hand with events or specific prognostications of good or evil and on the other with people playing a part in these events.

Thakadu or mudimo, the talus of the antbear represents the ancestors who, like the antbear, live underground; this bone shows whether the gods are angry or not and is diagnostic of the health or life of a person which in the last resort lies in ancestral hands. Dau, the phalanx of the lion (and, in some sets also ngwe, the phalanx of the tiger) which is also a pointing bone, showing direction, phiri, the knee-bone of the hyena, of which there may be two, male and female, and tshwene, male and female knee-bones of the baboon, all stand for the evil power of witches and their familiars. The baboon bones in addition indicate, by the side on which they fall, danger or illness on a journey, suitability of a chosen spot for building a village and,

in case of barrenness, whether or not a child will be born. Every set contains two peculiarly-shaped murula pips with functions less specific, depending as they do upon the whole configuration of forces or events, and a river pebble found in the stomach of a crocodile, lemaja la gwena (thing swallowed by a crocodile), which is diagnostic of khileso, the illness caused by foreign substances which sorcerors cause their victims to swallow with food or drink.

To bring these evil or good influences into relation with specific people, to determine who is ill or who is bewitching the consultants, the diviner turns to certain astralagus bones, capable of falling on four sides and representing people. Two or three sheep bones stand for important or respected persons, such as district or village heads, and goat bones, numbering two to six, for mere commoners - a real separation of sheep and goats! If there are two sheep or goat bones, they represent male and female; a third represents a child; four bones extends the range to male and female children and the further two bones differentiate widow and bachelor. Often female bones are distinguished by having a piece of wire wound round them since women wear wire leg-rings! Different totems are shown by bones of the animals revered. Lovedu sets have two (male and female) madavu (rietbuck) bones standing for the Crocodile totemic group; two phala (rooibuck) bones for Khalaga and sometimes also Lovedu

(royal group); two golove (wild boar) for the Lovedu, two phuti (duiker) for Khaha and Koni; two phosha (bushbuck) for Tshadzi of Mavuliana; and in areas in which there are Phalaborwa and Thavina also two nogo (porcupine). Elephants and Lions are represented by the bones of these animals already in the set. These totem-indicating bones vary greatly according to the people with whom the diviner comes into most contact. Many diviners have one or two extra pieces, such as a shell or a stone found in a strange place. Malamatsha, for instance, has a piece of chalk from France, where he served in the Labour Battalion during the Great War.

The detailed rules of divination need not be stated here; indeed they are far too specialised for cursory treatment and do not advance our general thesis any further. All that is necessary is a discussion of the general principles underlying divination. Firstly, it is the side on which the dice fall rather than their disposition to one another that is important. All the pieces can fall in two ways, either positive, dorsal or negative, ventral surface up, while in addition the astralagi have two narrower surfaces, one, the concave side, with a deeper cleft than the other, the convex side. In the normal position with dorsal side up, the power the bone stands for is said to be active, the person it represents well or walking in the direction it is lying; in the reverse position, with ventral side up, it is sleeping, powerless or dead and hence, when the powers represented are those of witchcraft, a good sign, for they are then on their backs and harmless. An astralagus lying on its convex

side with the cleft up shows laughing, happiness, talking or even quarrelling (much talking) and with the convex side up, anger, complaints, sadness.

Secondly, the significance of these positions and particularity of the combinations of the sets of four bones varies according to the purpose of the divination: a particular position means one thing when it is illness, another when it is a building site that is in question. Thirdly, despite intricate rules, divination is in the last resort not an exact science but an interpretation in which the diviner's ingenuity, his knowledge of human nature and his estimate of the interplay of motives in the society play an important part. In this connection the praises of each bone and of various positions have an unsuspected function. These praises are not trade secrets and are fairly generally known; to be word-perfect is unnecessary and parts may be recited or omitted while half may be uttered at one moment and the remainder much later. This occupies the mind of the client and gives the diviner time to think and orientate himself. Moreover, interpretation abounds with metaphorical expressions, as does the parlance of European fortune-tellers with its club-man and diamond-girls. When a divinor recites the praise !khadi e hadiga dithaga ya hadiga metse ea swa!, those present all understand that the father's sister is displeased and is the cause of the trouble; nothing further need be mentioned by the doctor.

Many Lovedu diviners, imitating the mugome use a peculiar chant, half-Shangana-Tonga, half Sotho, a jargon in which even

the normal pronunciation of Sotho words becomes distorted. This is difficult to understand and is re-interpreted by someone of the party more conversant than the client with the procedure or, if necessary, by the doctor himself. This somewhat resembles the use by 18th Century physicians of involved medical terms to impress patients with their knowledge. Doctors also often exaggerate the danger of an illness: Rathaga, to all appearances in perfect health, was told that his 'blood' and 'stomach' were in a most distressing condition. Similarly Mutzere whose swollen leg was diagnosed as due to witchcraft, was told, 'Only a brave man would dare to stay a moment longer in this village, it is so witch-ridden'; but he remained quite unimpressed. Despite these tricks, divining is not regarded as occult and many people have some knowledge of the meanings of different positions.

The doctor and diviner at work.

The procedure in divination is a subtle process, combining suggestion, free association of ideas and techniques of leading the client and inspiring confidence in the diviner. On opening the bags, the doctor pours out the dice and watches how they fall but he does not always vouchsafe anything at this stage. Before casting his dice he chews a piece of root (khirugulu or munonwe) which he blows out on to the bones or into a shell which he rubs against his bare chest: he or the bones are given insight and power in this manner. Then taking them in both hands and uttering a praise by way of encouragement, he casts them on to the floor or the mat provided. At this stage he reads the cardinal positions, perhaps elaborating on the general trend indicated,

and suggests what the client has come to consult him about, often in so doing eliciting some information. Thereafter the client himself throws the bones, speaking to them as dictated by the doctor; the Venda practice of bringing a piece of rag breathed upon by the patient is not known, but the consultant may be directed to mention the patient's name. The client will have to cast many times till the trouble has been thrashed out.

The next step is for the doctor, after suggesting a remedy, to cast the bones and interpret their reply to the suggestion. Whatever the cause of the illness, the first suggestion is usually placation of the ancestors and thereafter medicines and treatments. At each throw only some of the dice are studied, the position of the others being irrelevant to the immediate purpose. Sometimes it takes long (often, as we have seen, several hours or a whole afternoon) for the bones to give a clear indication and, if they fall in unreadable combinations, various causes may be assigned: the bones may not have been properly 'washed', the clients may be in a state of *thu khuma*; or the bones may just unaccountably 'refuse'.

To illustrate the procedure we give an actual case of divination simplified by the omission of praises. Dr Ramatiti had just finished divining for Nwagu when Dumedi, Nwagu's friend, who lived some ten miles away, came upon the scene and, handing over his shilling to the doctor, asked that the dice be thrown for him too. Ramatiti poured out the bones, looked at them but remained silent. He then chewed a piece of *khirugulu*, took the bones in both hands, spat on them and, mumbling a praise, cast

them. 'They have fallen muferefere'(a position meaning dissension), he said, uttering the relevant praise. 'You have been greatly troubled,' he continued, enlarging upon the greatness of the trouble. 'The tortoise bones lie mutagola'(indicating long illness), he added, 'You suffer from blood and intestinal trouble. Do you have dreams?' 'Yes', replied Dumedi, 'chiefly about dead people.' 'Tshwene'(the baboon bones), went on the doctor, 'are full (lie on their convex side), your sickness is on the chest.'

Thereupon Dumedi was given the bones to throw and told to repeat after the doctor a praise of the bones - 'Tell me, you spy-with-eyes-that-see (Mbofe wena tholo mudana wena wa matho a ho vona), tell me why we are afflicted; whether it be a god or whether it be a witch, tell us.' When the bones had fallen, the doctor asked, 'Do you know any gwena (the Crododile totem) are your in-laws Crocodile?' 'No', replied Dumedi, 'I know only neighbours, not relatives, who are Crocodile.' After Dumedi had denied that he had quarrelled with these people, the doctor warned him not to drink beer with them, and when Dumedi objected, 'But we are always drinking together,' he said, 'It is they who have given you khileso.' Dumedi was doubtful but replied, 'I remember that once, when I came out of the gomana initiation, a son of those neighbours gave me monkey nuts and afterwards my stomach was upset.'

Dumedi was made to throw the bones again and the doctor asked him if he were troubled by matter in the ears. Dumedi admitted that both his ears were affected and added, 'That is how the trou-

ble began, and I have tried many remedies in vain.' The doctor now had a substantial clue. 'The ears are causing blood on the chest,' he said. 'Has a lelope doctor tried to cure you?' 'No,' Dumedi replied, 'Only a woman who was one day called for my mother.'

The bones were once more thrown to determine whether the woman would succeed if she were called again. The malope bone lay on its back and with dau and phiri upside down, showing the power of the witches to be broken, and golove (wild boar) in its normal position, the doctor declared that Dumedi would recover. But though it was silently passed over, the diviner was mistaken in thinking that his client was of the golove totem. Again Dumedi threw the dice and the question asked, namely, whether he should offer to (suma) his dead father, was answered in the negative as unnecessary. But though phiri (hyena) and tshwene (baboon) lay powerless, the positive position the the lion (dau), associated with witches, indicated that the stomach-ache would remain. 'Have you bilharzia,' enquired the doctor. 'No,' was the reply, 'Well then, do you enjoy your beer?' 'No, one calabash fills me; I can't drink much.' Another throw, this time by the doctor, was favourable to the medicine mentioned as a cure. 'But', asked the doctor, as he scrutinized the bones, 'What child at home is ill?' When Dumedi said it was his, the doctor congratulated himself on his perspicacity and could not resist following up his success.

Dumedi thus had to cast the dice about his child. The doctor diagnosed zwiso (sores), a vague term covering external

rashes or sores of all kinds as well as internal trouvle, and a common complaint of children. 'Yes', replied Dumedi, 'the sores are in its mouth', adding a full account of the complaint. The Khilome goat astralagus (indicating a young male person) was lying positive, so the doctor said, 'It is a boy', but again he was wrong. Unperturbed, the doctor now threw the dice, having suggested the cure, 'Dung of witches (metaphorical for the insectiverous bat) and mice and moss hanging from trees. Burn one portion, holding the child in the smoke and smear its body with the other portion. Tell us, you spy-with-eyes-that-see. I say let my fowl (child) scratch (be well).' But the bone standing for a small girl(thowana bone of goat) fell on its back: the medicine would not succeed. Again the doctor threw, mentioning different ingredients but similar treatment, and this time the bones were propitious.

On the whole people are satisfied with rather vague statements: told that (according to the dice) he had learnt his doctoring from his mother's brother, Ramalepe said, (No, but one might say it is from him as it comes from my mother's people', and was quite satisfied. Moreover, clients are not there to trip up the doctor, but to get his help and advice so they freely discuss their troubles and clutch at every piece of information that is or borders on being correct.

Very different from the bone-thrower is the lelopa doctor who divines usually when his spirit, whom he is able to call up at will, is upon him. He may then divine without the use of any bones, merely singing out his divinations in the same way as all the possessed sing out their songs and messages, or he may throw

the bones, usually only once or twice to impress clients, for he hardly looks at them at such seances. Many lelɔpe doctors are, however, able to divine also by bone-throwing in the ordinary manner of doctors without their spirits descending upon them. This method they resort to when there are no attendants at hand to minister to their wants while the spirit is upon them.

The seance of the lelɔpe doctor is similar to that of ordinary possessed people which we describe elsewhere. But the doctor takes advantage of the large attendance to create a demand for his services, soliciting custom by well-chosen words addressed to various individuals about impending calamity or bad health, intended to awaken their interest or fears. He is often high-handed and overbearing, characteristics tolerated on account of the possessing spirit, and unlike the ordinary doctor, resorts constantly to the spectacular.

Mathorisane at work was a remarkable sight. Dressed in a leopard skin and many cloths, a man's tie and scarf fastened with gilt safety pins, she sat in the midst of her attendants and satellites with medicine bags to her left, divining set to the right. Her head was a masterpiece of feathers. Round it was a circlet of small circular skins, from her forehead rose a ball of black feathers which hung over the head like a feather duster while to the back were two large sloping plumes. Before her stood her most impressive marvel - an assegai stuck in the ground with a buck's horn balancing on a sixpence on the end of the shaft. The story of this horn standing unsupported on the hilt of an assegai had spread far and wide over the whole land and lent

great weight to all she said. It was believed that the horn could balance in this way only when the spirit was upon her and people gasped with astonishment when even they were able at her command to lift the horn and place it back to stand on end as before. The secret of the horn was simple: inserted on either side at the top, thicker end of the horn were two equal lengths of thick wire which maintained it in equilibrium. That the horn could stand unsupported would have been marvellous enough to the native; but that it could stand on end hampered by these wire encumbrances was nothing short of a miracle. Our explanation of the principle involved, practical illustrations with a variety of objects failed to impress even an educated man, a well-qualified teacher. He remarked, 'You may do it by science but the doctor does it by spirits. She knows nothing of science.' To him the fact that it formed part of European scientific principles added to, rather than detracted from, the wonder of the doctor's achievement.

The mugome is essentially a smeller-out, rather than a healer of disease. Though it is possible for people privately to consult a mugome as they do ordinary doctors, the main function of the mugome is his quasi-legal one of determining the incidence of guilt in cases of witchcraft, and in those cases of theft or adultery in which there is not sufficient evidence for the court to decide one way or the other. The procedure involves first private consultations of a doctor or lesser mugome, followed by an accusation directly or through an intermediary, a wager by the parties publicly made in court, then a journey in the company of an official witness of the court (called the 'ears') to a distant smeller-out, and the actual smelling out. The business of the

!ears! is to relate to the court the nature of the decision, the competence of the mugome, whether or not the parties consented to the decision, and details of the wager. He must be impartial and disinterested and receives a goat or ten shillings from each of the two parties, as well as provisions for the road. Unless there is a specific challenger and a specific accusation against someone, the court will not give its sanction to procedure of the parties to a smeller-out. It may also disallow the challenge and dismiss the case as nonsense (gwitshɛlɛ). Although it generally accepts the verdict of the smeller-out, it is not bound to do so. It is not necessary for accuser and accused to be present in person at the smelling-out; they may be and often are, especially in the case of women, represented by a relative.

When proceeding to a smeller-out, the parties have no definite destination. They set out in a north-easterly direction where megome abound, usually with the intention of going somewhere very far away; for the theory is that the more distant the mugome, the more reliable his verdict will be. After a day or two, however, they grow tired or the official witness complains of the heat and they find someone nearer. There is no conversation on arrival at the smeller-out except in so far as the party states its business, and full money payment is always required in advance on the understanding that if the parties are dissatisfied it will be returned to them to enable them to proceed elsewhere. The official witness, on appointment must be given the phitho (thing to be hidden), any small article such as a snuff-box or a coin which is concealed about his person and

must be named and found by the smeller-out as a test of his competence before divination begins. Unless he is able in addition to give the totem of everyone in the party and clearly to distinguish between accuser, accused and official witness, they will pass on to someone else.

It is sometimes said by Europeans that *mogome* have spies who bring them the information necessary for divining. This would, however, be impossible: not only do people come from all directions or tribes, sometimes as far distant as Mapulanong beyond the Olifants river, but it would require an elaborate system of espionage that could hardly be kept secret from the people in the conditions that obtain in Bantu society.

There is no doubt that *mogome* are clever and we have ourselves been amazed at the manner in which, under test conditions, a *mugome* was able to name and find an object hidden on our person. But it must be borne in mind that they use a trial and error technique, the *yuma* method, based upon the responses of the audience. In our experience (though of course the presence of a European is always a disturbing factor), after the first few responses the *mugome* begins to speak more and more loudly and quickly and a situation of free association of ideas and great suggestiveness arises. The consultants become less guarded and the *mugome*, skilled in his art, is able to draw conclusions from their reactions. A good deal of vagueness is, however, permissable: the term *mukhalaga*, for example, can refer to a number of different totems: *mukhalaga* proper, *mukhalaga munyai*, *mukhalaga dou* (elephant Khalaga) and this applies also to other aspects of their divination. In one case a man in the party was accused vi-

cariously on behalf of his 'elder brother or his wives, belonging to the Crocodile and Wild boar totems'. It so happened that a far-off classificatory 'brother' of the man concerned had wives of the Crocodile and Wild boar totems, a not unusual combination, so the guilt was immediately projected upon one of these two wives who happened to have been previously accused, though she had succeeded in clearing herself. An actual example will elucidate the methods employed.

Mudana accused Bodile, his half-brother's son, of stealing nine pounds. The case had been tried first at home and then at the Native Commissioner's where it had been dismissed owing to insufficient evidence. The parties decided to go to a smeller-out. On the second day of their journey, when they were resting under a tree to enable the official witness to take off his jacket, a small boy standing some way off said to them, 'There is a smeller-out over there.' He was a decoy watching the road to direct people to a diviner who had lately arrived and set up a temporary village of rough huts. Deciding that it was too hot to go further, the party followed the boy and sat down outside the village fence. A man approached them and, after ascertaining how much money they had to offer, showed them into an enclosure of old sacks. At the entrance stood the diviner himself, holding a stick under which the four members of the party were made to pass in single file. Diviners are said quite frequently to test their clients in some such manner: sometimes they are made to jump over a furrow and it is said the guilty man usually falls in!

When they had seated themselves on the ground the diviner asked first of all for his money. The official witness handed

him £1.5, but he insisted on 10/- more because, he said, it was a difficult case, one that had been much tried in other courts. Stick in hand, but without the use of any divining bones, the diviner began asking the party to respond (hu vuma). 'Ya vuma,' they replied, and he proceeded with his chanting in a mixture of Sotho and Shangana-Tonga in sing-song phrases at the end of which the clients had to assent. 'You have come from home on a matter' he began. Pointing to the official witness, he said, 'You have accused this boy (pointing to Bodile) of witchcraft - No, I'm making a mistake on purpose. You have not come for this reason.' Looking into a large shell, he continued, 'You have come on a different errand - You have come about money - The sum concerned is £30 - No. It is £15 - No, it is £10 - The owner of the money sells hemp.' Continuing in this manner in short phrases to which the party responded 'Ya vuma', and suggesting first this then that, he eventually said, 'I don't like to cause brothers by the same father to fight - Your quarrel is a vain one - The money was stolen by a woman of the Crocodile totem living near your village - She has not yet used the money.' Pointing to Bodile, he said, 'You, why do you want to kill him (Mudana) - and you (Mudana) be careful - They may kill you with medicines they have just bought.' Turning to the official witness, he demanded, 'Give me my hidden object (phitho) - What kind of thing is this which is hidden from me? - It is a snuff-box - No, it is a half-crown - No, it is a penny - No, it is European iron - If you think I am telling lies, take out of your left-hand pocket the thing which you have been given.' The

official witness took out of his pocket the battery of a torch! He doubted the competence of a diviner who had been so vague about the nature of the object; 'European iron' can be any metal object. But the main thing was that Bodile and Mudana were satisfied and so the party went home, relieved that it was an outsider who was found to be the culprit.

Objectively considered, this seance may appear naive, but the parties and even an outsider who was present did not think so. There was no initial and formal identification of accuser, accused and 'ears', which one expects from theoretical accounts; but forms and procedures are never set and it is nothing unusual for these identifications to emerge later as the divination proceeds. It is by theoretical standards necessary that the smeller-out, as a test of his competence, should name the totem or other groups of the consultants, but in this case the parties did not even notice the omission, as they were satisfied on the main issue. The smeller-out erred somewhat as regards both the sum involved and the relationship of Mudana and Bodile; but the parties were impressed that he was only £1 out and, although they were not brothers, they were related through brothers. The wide connotation of terms and indefiniteness of conceptions lend themselves as meanings and rigid categories in a European language cannot do, to manipulation by the smeller-out and ready acceptance by the parties of suggestions. In the khore (court), the vanquished party often complains of the vague or incorrect indications as to totems and of other unsatisfactory features, but unless the

'ears' agrees, the court usually dismisses these objections since, if he had really been dissatisfied, he would have demanded back the money from the smeller-out and proceeded to another. But it is necessary to add that the smeller-out often backs up his art with a very high-handed manner and it is not an easy matter for one of the two parties to claim back his money.

When a diviner finds anyone guilty of witchcraft, he shaves one side of the witch's head and takes from him his jacket or any object of clothing he would like to have. To the successful party is given a small buck's horn to blow on his way home as proof of his success. He proceeds to the royal village to report and is met with the joyful trillings of the women who, on hearing the horn, come into the courtyard to welcome him with dancing steps of gladness. Later the case will come before the court and the unsuccessful party will be made to pay his wager (sometimes cattle, sometimes money). Usually the unsuccessful party complains in court that the smeller-out made some mistake in mentioning the totems or was too vague, and demands to go to another smeller-out, but unless the official witness agrees with their statements the court generally accepts the verdict.

Smellers-out sometimes greatly exceed the powers which custom allows to them. They browbeat clients, beat and otherwise ill-treat anyone they have smelt out as a witch and demand exorbitant payments. In one case the attendants of a smeller-out seized the accused, pulled off all his clothes (witches generally are naked) and ordered him to dance the dance of

witches. Cowed by the enormous odds against him he did a few dancing steps whereupon he was ordered to climb a tree and fly (jump) down like a witch. He was beaten and his whole head was shaved. When he asked for his clothes they made him pay £2 for them and not satisfied with this, cut off one leg of the trou ers. This case is exceptional but illustrates the lengths to which some smellers-out will go. Such action is, however, possible only in outlying areas far from the administrative centres of the European for, great though his powers be, the smeller-out holds a precarious position in the modern world which has declared his activities illegal. Occasionally the technique of the smeller-out is directed towards preventing the consultants from giving him away to the authorities. 'If you say I'm a liar', declared one smeller-out to the parties, 'take back your money and go elsewhere. I even challenge you to take me to the Europeans; they will agree with me as I have a license to divine!'

Payment of doctors.

Smellers-out are the wealthiest doctors, receiving anything from £1 to £7 at a sitting. Many set up temporary villages along the roads to catch clients and one, living in Portuguese East Africa has a motor lorry for transporting clients from the Transvaal lowveld to his home, over a distance of a hundred miles or more. But the smeller-out, like the specialist in our own society, has no personal relations with his clients and the Lovedu rely mostly upon the ordinary bone-diviner. He receives a fowl or a shilling for divination and perhaps, if he is mercenary or

has taken great pains about the medicine, half-a-crown or five shillings for opening the medicine bags. But payment for treatments is made only for successful cures and this is made chiefly in beer. The family doctor usually receives nothing at all but is called to all beer that is drunk in the family.

The nature of the payment, which the doctor shares not only with his own friends and relatives but with those members of his patient's family who have carried the beer, indicates how far removed from purely economic conceptions such payments are. The bone-thrower is an important person in the society, not because his practice brings him wealth, but because disease is a matter of ever-present interest. Certain 'difficult' cures warrant special payment other than thanking beer: the correct charge for curing barrenness or epilepsy is £1 or £1.10. But in practice charges vary according to the pocket of the patient and personal relations between him and the doctor, and we have seen cures for barrenness for which only the goat that was killed or beer was given.

A patient on recovery should not, unless he wishes to run the risk of a return of his illness, shave his head before thanking beer has been taken to his doctor, who will shave the 'hair of illness' (meriri ga/ulwadi) with medicine and put it in a wet place or hollow tree with the words, 'Sickness remain there.' Though we have seen many cases in which this rule was strictly adhered to, it is as often as not observed in the breach.

Lolopo doctors are usually mercenary, requiring a goat for most of their treatments and fining patients who shave their heads without permission. There is often, however, considerable

bickering about such payments. A man may insist that he has no money but in the end the doctor usually wins.

Bogi, who took his wife to be treated for barrenness said he had no money for the goat demanded by the doctor for use in the treatment. In spite of the threats on the part of the possessing spirit that he would depart and the warnings of the attendants that Bogi might rue his action when his wife remained uncured, he stoutly held out until the doctor with a master-stroke said, 'Take out the money you placed in your pocket when you left home.' Then, thinking his wife must have mentioned this to someone (which he later found was quite erroneous) he paid his ten shillings - without a blush at having lied so manifestly.

A doctor never goes to court about his fees but sometimes he threatens to cover up (hu pushelela) the holes where he dug the medicines, to call back illness upon the patient. Lovedu etiquette demands that, before proceeding to another doctor when the medicines of one have proved ineffectual, a man should acquaint the doctor with his intention (hu laela).

General.

The Lovedu desire for quick results involves much walking about the countryside from one doctor to another, a duty devolving upon the father or husband. Women other than widows cannot go to consult doctors. To a European it may sound naive when a man gives the illness of his baby as an excuse for breaking an appointment or neglecting important tasks. But to a Lovedu this is not so. It is considered one of the most binding duties of men and during our stay the chief councillor missed what he him-

self considered a most important meeting of chiefs with the Native Commissioner because his four-months-old baby was ill.

Belief in divination is not difficult to understand. The average European who pins his faith to X rays or the stethoscope has no more knowledge of their function than the native who blindly accepts the verdict of the bones. Both have been brought up to believe the things accepted by their society. Moreover the Native doctor has as many cures to his credit as the average European doctor; for who can tell with any degree of certainty the part played by nature, and how far nature succeeds in spite of, how far by the aid of, medical practices? The attitude of the Lovedu to their physicians is also similar to ours. Great as is the influence of Lovedu doctors, they are never thought to be infallible; yet one does not condemn all doctors because one of them has made a mistake or is not up to standard. There are Natives who are sceptics and have little faith in doctors; but scepticism will never prevent a man from fulfilling the socially enjoined duty of consulting doctors when his wife or children are ill. Failure to do this would result in accusations of neglect and might have serious social consequences.

Absence of a scientific outlook, however, makes the Lovedu credulous, uncritical and easily impressed. Sofonia, whose main subject of conversation for weeks had been his swollen legs which he attributed to the machinations of his step-mother, was nevertheless deeply impressed when a close neighbour, under the influence of her possessing spirit told him his stepmother had bewitched him. The European, questioning the whole basis of this kind of spirit possession immediately suspects fraud; the native, accep-

ting the phenomenon, is deeply impressed that the spirit should confirm his suspicions. Even the evangelist near the royal village, whose life has been devoted to breaking down heathen superstition, tells in all seriousness of a pig with hair only on its chin which was shot by his father - in reality a man 'sent' to frighten a woman into returning to her husband.

The importance of suggestion and how it may be used by doctors is well illustrated in the case of Simeon, a married man of about twenty three, educated in the mission school, intelligent, sceptical and not easily impressed. His mother had gone to a doctor to 'divine about her home', as many people do even when nothing is wrong, in order to ward off impending dangers. She was told a witch had introduced an object into the body of her son; he was coughing badly, so badly that people would soon think it was dere, the woman's disease, but if he came on the following Sunday, the doctor would take out the cause of the trouble. When his mother mentioned this to Simeon he was surprised, for as yet he felt no inconvenience. As Sunday drew nearer he began to feel ill; he began to cough and his breathing became difficult, making him unable to walk fast or run. On Saturday night he coughed all the time and did not have a wink of sleep. At about 8 a.m. his mother told him to get up and accompany her to the doctor and when he begged to be allowed to lie a little longer, she refused, saying, 'Do you want me to lose you? People are already saying you have dere.' The journey of four miles was to Simeon a terrible ordeal; he felt he could hardly walk and would

never arrive. At sunrise they arrived at the village of the doctor, who treated him with emetics which afforded immediate relief. Within a few days the cough had disappeared and Simeon was fit once more.

There is no clear-cut distinction between doctor and witch. A doctor may be a witch like anyone else, and since it is the business of doctors to counteract the evil of witches it is believed they must know a good deal about the subject. Furthermore, doctors must be able to protect themselves against witches; they 'fix' their bodies each year against enemies and many boast about having sent lightning to 'try' (hu lega) other doctors, an action that would be considered witchcraft in an ordinary man. The blame for 'killing medicines' obtained from a doctor attaches to the client who used them, not the doctor who supplied them, unless it can be shown that the doctor was in league with his client to kill a common enemy. There have in our experience been cases in which doctors have been accused of witchcraft and found guilty, but on the whole, it is not in the interest of doctors to use their medicines against the public. Powerful doctors are too greatly feared even to be accused of witchcraft.

Though there are cases, more particularly in the towns, where doctors carry on their profession as a money-making business and use the same medicines for every conceivable kind of complaint, Lovedu doctors as a class are not charlatans or dupes. The majority of them are as convinced of their powers and as earnest in their work as are European doctors. The office of the Lovedu doctor is both important and honourable, for he is the guardian of

the people's welfare. There is no oath that binds him to loyalty and integrity but these things are expected of him; he even preserves the secrets of his clients and, though smellers-out and [illegible] doctors advertise themselves, such action in a bone-thrower or herbalist is regarded as derogatory.

CHAPTER 4

ANCESTOR WORSHIP.

Nature spirits and hero-gods have no place in the Lovedu scheme of things. There is, however, khuzwane, the creator, who made all things, including men, and left his footprints on certain rocks in the north when they were new and soft. But no one knows what has happened to him and no one ever thinks of him. The term mudimo is sometimes used instead of khuzwane but how far this is due to Christian influence is difficult to tell. The heathen uses the word mudimo in various contexts: to a barren woman who complains that she has no children people will say in a commiserating voice 'Go mudimo'- it is god or fate, nothing can be done; a man may point to a sacred bead or shrine and say, 'Go mudimo wa ga' (it is my god); the smallest of the four sacred drums is referred to as mudimo and the term is extensively used as the singular of vadimo or medimo (ancestral spirits). But when thinking in terms of the Creator or first cause, the heathen uses khuzwane though he will when asked say that khuzwane is mudimo. The gods whom the Lovedu worship are their ancestors, deceased fathers and mothers who guard them in death as they did in life. Each family has its own ancestors, and religious observances are thus peculiarly a family concern. Since the ancestors of the queen are able to withhold rain and the whole tribe is affected if there is drought, people are in this respect dependent upon the royal ancestors; but only the descendants of those ancestors can

placate them.

Attributes of the ancestors.

The attributes of ancestors are various. They are one's greatest protectors; no harm can befall one unless they are neglectful. Witches, mighty as they are, can neither enter the village nor cause sickness without the connivance of the ancestors; hence the procedure in divination even in the clearest case of witchcraft, of enquiring whether the spirits should be placated. Disease cannot enter nor epidemics break out if only the ancestors are watchful enough and well-disposed. Again and again one finds this idea expressed in prayers: 'Protect us from the dangers of night and day. Do not open for us wind (epidemics) thus letting the witches finish us off,' said an officiator pouring a libation for a sick child. (Le re thivele zwa vusiu le zwa matsiare. Le khi re vulele phefo valoi va re fɛja). And the queen in a prayer at her harvest ceremony put it even more positively: 'As regards life, we have been very well but now we are being killed by that epidemic which you have allowed to come', referring to smallpox (Ho phela re ve re kha phela re di'o volawa ge zwikhuva zwa phefo yana ve le re phuleɬho). There can be no success without the co-operation of the ancestors. medicine cannot help nor doctors heal if the ancestors are not with one. This idea, reminiscent of our 'By the will of God' is expressed in the phrase, 'We do not say our doctor (will heal), we say our doctor and the ancestors (Are re ŋaga heau; re ŋaga heau le vadimo). It appears also in a prayer we heard on behalf of an absent son working in town, when a goat, dedicated to his grandmother (father's mother) who had

made him ill two years before, was being given the new corn: 'Here is the child, here he is, mother. We ask that you let him be happy and cool (give him health). Tell all the other spirits (certain spirits mentioned), and we who remain, we say our thing with the gods'. (Su-wo muyana, su-wo mma-wo. Re re a thakhale a tabya go phefo. Le sumanane gamoga Vo-Sedena le ..... Le rena va re sadeho re re khilo khesu le vadimo).

In view of this ever-watchful protection of the ancestors, the phrase 'vadimo lalane (spirits, sleep) which rounds off so many prayers, and the constant fear of waking up (hu dzusa) the ancestors, causing them to 'stand' (hu ema) and cause trouble, appear at first as a peculiar contradiction. It is as though people do not wish their gods to be watchful. The use of the term lala here is, however, idiomatic expressing peace, things being as they should be, as in the phrase, ha va mulao; shago la lala (there was order; the country slept), implying that all was well and the rains had been good; while hu dzusa in this sense means stirring to anger rather than waking up from sleep. To prevent ancestors from being too quickly stirred up, charms of forgetfulness (vulevaja) are used in libations and in shrines.

The ancestors are responsible for the fertility of the crops. True, nothing could grow without rain, for which the queen is responsible and which royal ancestors only have the power of withholding; further, differences in the harvest between one area and another are often attributed to fights between the witches of the two areas and even differences in yield between one man's filed and his neighbour's may be due to witchcraft. Yet one finds in prayers many a request for a good harvest and though

there are no special sowing rites as ng the Lovedu, it is significant that the only regular religious observance is the harvest offering of beer made of each year's new corn in villages where there are shrines or dedicated animals. A man pouring a libation for a sick child added to his request for her health, 'Give us corn; when we plough let us also reap. Why are you stinting us so that when we plough we return empty-handed?' (Lo re fa mavɛle re re gia loma re voya nao. Le diwa ge hu re dima ra go rea loma ra voya fɛla). When anyone dies there is thought to be danger that the fertility of the crops will depart with him or her. Hence when a gourd of seeds of every kind is placed in the grave together with a firebrand and calabash of water for the journey, some of the seeds are scattered over the body with words such as those which we heard at an actual burial. 'Do not depart with all the corn and seeds and kill people. Here is water. You will travel drinking where you go. And there are seeds; you can sow them when it is spring. Here, too, is fire to kindle where you go.' (Le khi re dohele le mavele le dibeu gamoga; le khi re vulaele vatho. Mamzi se ao, le do no vda le khi nwa mo le yaho; le dibeu se jeo, le do no hasha ve he khi lemahile; le mullo susu le do hejeja mo le yaho). Very often the grain belonging to the deceased is treated with medicine in order that it may remain fertile.

Above all, however, the ancestors complain, a fact which lies at the basis of Lovedu religion, for by far the greater proportion of religious rites are those performed in response to ancestral complaints. One might at first think it strange that the gods, in life just ordinary, well-disposed people, should in death be

so liable to bring trouble upon their kin. Sometimes it is thought to be a sign of love: when Masilu's grandmother had made him ill because she wanted a goat dedicated to her, his mother said, 'No wonder his gogo seized him. She was always so fond of him.' But chiefly it is in the nature of ancestors to complain; as the Lovedu phrase it, 'When people sleep, i.e., are dead, they ought to complain' (Ha vathe va khi lala fase va swanede hu velaela).

Ancestors by their complaints cause illness; when a baby cries all day it is very often because an ancestor is pinching him because he wants the child to bear his name; sore eyes are frequently caused by ancestors and cured by being washed in water containing ancestral beads; it is ancestors who sometimes 'hold' the woman experiencing difficult childbirth. Sometimes, but far less than among the Nguni, their complaints cause dreams. Our friend, Walter, coming to seek work in Johannesburg dreamt disturbing dreams of his dead father who appeared to say that he was needed at home. He thereupon returned home and, when he arrived, his mother took him to a doctor whose bones declared that the dead father was annoyed at not having been told of the journey to town and had to be appeased by the phasa rite. Walter's case was clearly one of frustration. He was well-educated but had failed his teacher's examination and felt doubly thwarted: he had great ambitions of reforming the political system of the tribe, from which his education had divorced him, and in town he was dissatisfied that nothing was open to him but the unskilled work of his uneducated compatriots.

An ancestor may complain about the way he has been buried,

and if he has died far from home, may demand to be 'brought back home' in a ceremony in which, besides the dedication of a beast or goat, a goat is killed and eaten, its bones being buried as though it were a person. But this 'bringing home' involving as it does the making of a shrine, applies only to those dying at a distance and does not resemble the 'bringing home' of the Zulu, among whom it is part of death ceremonial. At times the gods complain of neglect; yet unlike the Nguni, they never complain of being hungry; nor are the gods said to drink the libation or even its spiritual counterpart, but are merely pleased to be given their due.

In the majority of cases, however, no definite reason for the complaint is either given or required; and frequently no special spirit is mentioned. It is enough to know that it is ancestors causing the trouble and what rite is necessary to placate the gods. Even complaints of neglect are usually put positively: 'He complains that you should give him (his shrine) a libation' (O velaela hore le fe thugula ya hwe). It is the practical aspect of religion that is of importance to the Lovedu, the real nature of the ancestral complaint being of little interest, and each rite has a certain definite end. Moreover, there is no such thing as resting secure because you have done all that is necessary for the gods; often the most punctilious devotees are the people who are most troubled by the gods. As there is always some ancestor who can cause trouble it is best to wait and see what is wanted. Further, the ancestors are wayward; there is no knowing what they may desire. Mambeuli asked to be buried at Sekhote but after his

death caused sickness, saying, 'Why did you bury me in the valley in the sun (instead of in the ancestral grove)' and a black sheep had to be sacrificed on his grave. Similarly Mulogwane, brother of the queen, who in 1934 became a Christian on his death-bed, withheld rain in 1955 because they had buried him in a Christian cemetery. Though ancestors often require beads to be worn by certain people, to wear such beads without having been told to do so is no surety against complaints. The gods might then grumble that you are despising them by wearing their beads without their permission.

If one is to judge by the means employed to placate complaining ancestors, their main desires appear to be that they should be remembered: they want their beads worn, their name revived, a goat dedicated to them and called by their name. In pouring a libation, an officiator mentioned, 'Here are your dithugula (beads) we still have them, Phedola' (Thugula jenu se je; re khe'e naje, lena Phedola). Ancestors have an implacable desire to assert their life. They also like to be told things, just as do living relatives; they want to know about cattle that come and go and journeys to be undertaken. It must not, however, be thought that steps are taken to comply with such desires to keep the spirits satisfied: people only tell the ancestors of a marriage if there has been illness in the home and a man pours a libation before undertaking a journey only if he expects trouble. It is usual, however, to ensure good luck before setting out with khirula beer (beer carried to relatives-in-law or friends) by pouring a little on the ground for the spirits. Religious rites among the Lovedu tend, then, to be addressed to those spirits that cause

cause trouble, and in the absence of illness and disaster there may be no rites at all.

Sacred objects, shrines and dedicated animals.

Certain objects which were once in the possession of the ancestors are used in religious ceremonial and are thought to have special powers of protection and healing. These objects, consisting of ancient beads of glass or native-worked iron or copper, native-wrought assegais, hoes, axes, iron rods with spiked heads, are handed down in the family and carefully cherished. But the Venda custom of forging special assegais for each ancestor is unknown. Sacred objects are called dithugula. When dithugula are brought out in the presence of a young child who has not seen them before, a little ash or earth is always smeared under each eye, lest it become blind. Very often when a woman leaves to be married, she is given a few of the family beads to take with her for use when she is ill.

Illness caused by an ancestor can generally be cured by a ceremony known as hu phasa: a mixture of water and eleusine that has been ground is poured over beads or other thugula objects in the presence of the patient while a prayer 'scolding' the ancestor and asking for health, is made. The beads are then worn by the patient until he recovers. After hu phasa on beads for anyone he may wear them at any time with protective results, and small children generally wear many old beads. Maseriba called hers 'my hospital' (spitele sa ga) to illustrate their powers to us in European idiom. Patzere says that if he does not wear the crocodile bone that was his father's, he gets ill or dreams much of dead people. It is association with the ancestors, not anything in-

herent in these objects that gives them their powers, for we have seen even an old Boer gun that had belonged to an ancestor being brought out as a thugula at an offering. Yet for a charm to have it is not essential that it should have been in the possession either of the complaining ancestor himself or his family. Sometimes the gods, through the dice, mention beads or other objects not known in the family at all. It is then concluded that they have been lost and steps are taken to procure them from someone else or from the queen who has many. For this purpose real old Sotho beads or iron implements must be obtained. When they phas with such a charm, they say, 'We are replacing the lost bead (re sbeleja ga muruga wo). Family beads used in the cure of a sick person are usually returned to their keeper on the recovery of the patient. People have great faith in the healing powers of these sacred objects. Philip, a Christian, says there is no doubt that they do cure; only, since no dead person could cure the living, it must be God working through the dithugula.

Offerings may be poured on the ground or on thugula objects. Sometimes, however, the ancestors desire a shrine or a dedicated animal. The queen herself and some others have a dedicated head of cattle, male or female according to the spirit represented; a few families have a sheep while the majority have goats. Fowls are neither dedicated to, nor killed for, the gods. But we have one instance of a dedicated snake, that in the Nelela family, to which in 1939, at their burial grounds in the depths of the forest libations were offered when the vyali initiation for girls began in that district; the conception is wholly alien to the Lovedu, though the Nelela have so long been linked with, as to be indistinguishable from, them; and the snake, said to

whistle, is described as like that dreaded monster, the 'mountain snake', which is often thought of as a mamba but strikes terror like the omen it is. The use of these different animals is traditional in, and bears no relation to the wealth of, the familes concerned; some have a dedicated animal, others merely a shrine, while many have both. The dedicated animal receives the name of an ancestor, father or grandfather in the case of the head of a lineage, or of any complaining spirit that has demanded such thugula (as seen in the dice); and it is believed that his spiri (moya) has entered into it. Some dedicated animals are credited with abnormal powers; Mamujaji's agitation one day while being driven to the dip correctly presaged unpleasantness with the dip-inspector; Malegudu is the fiercest bull in the land like the warrior whom he represents. Though some people unceremoniously pour beer offerings down the throat of dedicated animals, it is generally claimed that unlike ordinary animals they readily drink beer. But in fact a good deal of coaxing is generally necessary and often mealie leaves are placed over the beer. In 1938 when Malegudu, called from the herd to drink the harvest beer, remained immovable, everyone was afraid to approach him; but it was considered sufficient to throw the beer over him from a distance so that by licking himself he might partake of the offering. Dedicated animals never pass as marriage cattle and can never be sold, but it sometimes happens that they are seized by the European authorities in execution of a debt. When a dedicated

animal grows old, it is killed and replaced by another as there is a feeling that it should not die a natural death, but we know of many cases in which such animals have died. Didi lost two dedicated beasts in succession. When the first died, it was said the spirit did not like the officiator who had 'placed' him, so the next was 'placed' by someone else. But when it, too, died Didi decided merely to keep a horn of the dead beast as his thugula.

Shrines, which are to be found generally on the left-hand side of the entrance to the sleeping hut of the chief wife, vary in appearance and contents. A shrine may consist of a small mound of earth containing the bones of a sacrificial goat, it may be a sacred plant or tree, usually titigwane (Hypoxis villosa) or leome (Haemanthus sp.) and mutabu (Ficus capensis), it may be a black river stone, a long stick of khirale or even a piece of a certain kind of antheap (khithoni). The queen's own shrine is a mound under which are buried the bones of a goat slaughtered some twenty years ago when it was set up. Mashishimali's shrine contains no bones but consists of a titigwane lily and a river stone, both visible above ground. Ramatiti has three shrines and one dedicated goat, all of which have arisen out of illness caused by ancestral complaints. Of the first, the shrine of his father, nothing is visible above ground; it consists of a buried piece of antheap (used instead of a goat because Ramatiti is not the chief son who should have the dedicated animal) and a black river stone which keeps the spirit cool and appeased (lying down), as well as three plant substances, mufera, lesogo (Alipidia sp.?) and vulevaja, which are placed in most shrines to make the ances-

tors forget'. The second shrine, for his mother, consists of a mound. Originally they dedicated a live, female goat to his mother, killing another for her shrine; later when the dedicated goat died, its bones, too were buried in the shrine. The third shrine represents his mother's brother, who is also his wife's father (since he married his cross-cousin); it contains the bones and head of a slaughtered goat. To the mother's brother is dedicated also a goat, which is still alive.

Religious officiators.

The officiator in all important religious rites the the khadi the father's eldest sister or if she be dead, her niece, the eldest child of her brother. A sister has a very special position in Lovedu social life. Not only is the eldest sister the priestess in the family, but the sister whose cattle have made a man's marriage possible has a great deal of influence in his household, with power even to cause illness if she has a complaining heart. On the death of the father,too, it is the eldest sister who, together with the father's brother, if he be alive, divides out the inheritance, and, at the only installation of a district head that we were able to witness, the emblems of office were handed over to the young heir's sister for him though he was already in his twenties. But men may also perform religious ceremonies: if for example, the father's sister is too old to walk a long distance to perform a ceremony, she may send her son to do it on her behalf. Moreover, especially in libations to cure illness, a man may be pointed out by the bones to officiate. But for the annual harvest offering it is the khadi who should officiate and we have on such occasions never seen a man pouring the beer

though we have heard that it may happen.

Libations.

In the actual working religion of the Lovedu the commonest and most conspicuous rite is hu phasa, consisting of a prayer and the pouring on to the earth or on some thugula object of a mixture of ground, sprouted grain and water, a mixture collequill referred to as matazwa lesalo (the rinser of the winnowing basket). In case of illness this is done in the presence usually of the sick person, and where beads have been phasa'd on they may be tied round the neck of the patient with the words, 'Give her health'. More rarely hu phasa is merely spitting out water in the courtyard to the accompaniment of such prayer. There is no formulated distinction in principle between the two forms; the Lovedu say that the dice decide which is to be used. We found water squirted: in illness caused by complaints of the living; in some cases of difficult birth; where in the initiation of a possessed woman the spirit was begged to manifest itself; and in one exceptional instance of squirting water on the face of a corpse addressed in prayer before it was buried (usually the corpse is merely addressed when the grains are put in the grave). The efficacy of hu phasa, which is also used magically to render witchcraft ineffectual, appears to lie in its 'cooling' effect. Hu phasa is performed in connection with a large number of cases of illness and bad luck and is the recognised approach in asking for blessings on a journey or an undertaking. Hardly a week passes without someone in the neighbourhood having to phasa and generally the prayer in these cases takes the form of a 'scolding (hu rohana), in which the spirits are asked why they are causing

illness and told to be satisfied. One does not phasa without also using charms in the mixture to make the spirits forget and the officiator may be male or female, whomsoever the dice have indicated. Rites of thanksgiving, except for the customary harvest beer, are almost unknown. We came upon such a rite only once when the bachelor brother of Madinji returned home after an absence in town of thirty years and she performed hu phasa, in the presence of the family, saying, 'Spirits of Mamheuli, this is one of your fowls. We thought he was lost; now he is back. Keep him as you have kept the rest of us. If he goes away, let him soon remember and long for his home.' There are no religious rites connected with birth, initiation or death, although before circumcision and before the vyali girls' initiation it is necessary for the district head holding the ceremony to let the ancestors know and obtain their blessings.

The only regular offering is the annual harvest beer given to dedicated animals and shrines, though even this may be neglected. The village may be moved without the shrine, or the dedicated animal die without being replaced. We ourselves witnessed the setting up of a shrine and dedicated sheep after twenty years neglect in the chief house of Sedena. The harvest offering is much more formal than ordinary rites of hu phasa; it may take place any time between July and November, for there is here no rule that the queen should take precedence. The officiator is, where possible, a woman, the khadi, who is specially called to come and real beer, called muphaba and made of eleusine, is prepared for the ceremony. If eleusine is not available, red kaffir corn (makhaha) may be used but no other grain is acceptable

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