

and his hands examined. If they show signs of skinning A has proved his case and B must pay compensation for the wrong done. If the hands are healthy B is innocent and must be paid a bow by A for bringing a false accusation. In either case the "dipper" gets his fee.

For many years I thought there must be some trickery attached to this practice but I am now convinced that this is not the case.

Sudan Notes and Records

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A FEW CURES FOR SNAKE-BITE.

By T. R. H. Owen.

In July, 1941 I was on trek among the Tegali hills east of Rashad and at the village of a certain omda, Hassan El Zein, of the Kawahla Arabs. After a busy day we went out for recreation to hunt guinea fowl. We were returning shortly before sunset, and were only two hundred yards from the village on some gravelly soil when the omda dropped one of the guinea fowl, gave a hop and exclaimed "A snake bit me!" Looking down I saw the snake wriggle off into a bush and there was a bite, exuding blood, on the inside of the omda's left ankle.

We hurried into the village and I made the usual incision, squeezed blood, cauterized the wound, and clapped on a tourniquet. This done the omda was handed over to his relatives and sympathizers for further treatment.

Firstly there was a request for *limuns*. Luckily I had some *limuns*, which were cut up and given him to suck, as to a football team at half-time.

Secondly a hole was dug in the ground, the victim sat beside it and the afflicted leg was placed in the hole, the earth shovelled in round it and rammed well down; and so it was left for about ten minutes. This was "to prevent the poison rising up the leg."

Thirdly a jorum of semn was produced, at least a teacupful, and was drunk down at a gulp. The patient seemed to like this.

Fourthly some roots of the *sumeima*, also known as *shagar el morfa'in*, a species of caper and not uncommon on gravelly soil, were crushed up and pounded to a pulp and administered mixed with a little water. This was less well received.

Fifthly the whites of four hens' eggs were brought in a bowl and taken neat.

Sixthly a chunk of *khartit* or rhinoceros horn was produced. In the interest of game preservation I inquired as to its origin and learned, as expected, that it was a precious family heirloom, being no longer

obtainable on the market. This was the *pièce de resistance*, the undoubted cure. A very small piece was carefully filed off into a cup, about two tablespoonfuls of milk added, the mixture well stirred and the dose drunk off.

Seventhly a fiki was called in to make a *mihaya*. He had been sitting all this while in a corner writing on the usual large wooden board the verses of the Koran prescribed for snakebite (ان الله يمك السوات والارض). This writing is done with a quill pen in copious sepia ink of a thick consistency. It must take nearly a small coffee-cupful of ink to cover the board. This ink was then washed off into a bowl with a little water in it, stirred, and the potion drunk off.

Eighthly and lastly the women came and demanded the corpse of the snake. I led back a party, in the dusk, and as luck would have it we found him still in the bush where he had taken refuge and from which he had never budged. He was killed and proved to be a fifteen inch *washshasha* or saw-scaled viper (*Echis carinatus*) probably the commonest and most widely distributed poisonous snake in the country and not infrequently fatal. It was given, on the end of a stick, to the women, who wrapped it carefully in cowdung, baked it at the fire and buried it outside the village. The object was "to keep the patient's leg cool": had the snake been left out in the sun next day, the leg would become hot and inflamed.

It was now dark. The leg was swollen and very painful but the omda in good heart though apprehensive, as his uncle and one of his father's wives had both been killed by snakebite, the latter by a *washshasha*. I was assured that if he succeeded in being sick all would be well. On thinking of the eggs, the semn, the roots, the rhino-horn and the ink, there seemed a good chance therefore of recovery. Nor was hope disappointed. After much pain the patient was gloriously sick at midnight, got a little sleep thereafter and next day was out of danger. Full recovery took nearly three weeks.

The only disappointing thing is that it is difficult for medical science to determine which of the various condiments and sympathetic magics saved him.

A DINKA PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURE.

By Norman Nunn.

This ceremony, carried out annually among the Northern Dinka, is for the purpose of bringing an end to the people's sicknesses. These observations were made early in November at Banjang in the Upper Nile Province. I asked to be allowed to witness the proceedings, and at about 7 a.m., the rain-maker himself came to call me—a sufficient token that I would not be an unwelcome intruder. The people, young and old, from the two villages nearest to our station were making their way to the river. Each carried a cob of dura, and some had short pieces of dura stalk in their hands which represented absent members of their families, some being too sick to attend, others being ten miles or so away with the cattle, sheep and goats, while others had less excuse for their absence. Possibly these last were sceptical about the efficacy of the rite, but no doubt all of them had near relatives interested enough in their welfare to see that they were represented by a piece of dura stalk.

Arriving at the river bank I found the people sitting in a roughly semi-circular formation a few yards from the water's edge. The rain-maker, who had gone on ahead of me, was standing in the middle of the group holding a green, newly-opened gourd in his hand. As each fresh batch of people arrived they went up to him and spat into the gourd adding also a little offering of a few grains of dura or a few drops of native beer. It was amusing to watch the efforts of parents urging or coaxing the smaller children, overawed by the occasion, to make their contribution to the gourd. Where these efforts failed and where the children were altogether too young to comply, the rain-maker passed the gourd across the child's back, evidently an alternative means of securing the benefits of the ceremony on his behalf. When all had contributed to the gourd in this way the rain-maker, with several elder men and women standing on either side of him, faced the river while the others continued sitting as before. The whole company then began chanting a kind of chorus, at the same time holding their hands out in front of them with upturned palms,