



The Zulu Kafirs of Natal

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The Zulu Kafirs of Natal.

By the Rev. Father Fr. Mayr, Pietermaritzburg, Natal.
With illustrations. — (Continued.)

V. Medicines and Charms.

In preparing this article I have endeavoured to accomplish two objects: first and chiefly, to convey an idea of the great number of medicinal plants of this country and the different methods of using them, and secondly to show how much superstition underlies the Zulus' habits and thoughts especially at the time of illness or in connection with war, or in trying to prevent misfortune or secure success in their different pursuits.

The order or system followed in this article is a purely artificial one. In the native mind there exists no system or order, nor clear line between medicine (*umuti*) and charm (*intelezi*). Many a time the plant as it is used by the natives is believed to be a medicine and called so by them; but a European would say that this plant cannot have the supposed effect, and therefore is not really a medicine but a charm. Medicinal plants may be classified according to the different ways in which they are applied, as follows:

1. Emetics (*imiti yokuhlanza*).

For this purpose either the leaves of the plant or its roots, or both, are bruised and mashed with a small stone on a larger one, then put in a cooking pot, mixed with more or less water, boiled down and strained. In most cases a great quantity (1, 2 or more pints) of that water has to be drunk by the patient, generally warm. The morning is the best time for taking an emetic. As the vomiting follows immediately after the taking of the medicine, the patient drinks it in a kneeling position outside the kraal on the grass, and has a stiff feather of a hen in readiness to pass it up and down the throat, assisting and increasing the vomiting in this way.

Emetics are taken chiefly for bronchitis, colds and fever.

The chief emetical plants for colds and fevers are these: *Iboza* (*Moschosma riparia*), the leaves of which are used for the purpose. The powdered bark of the roots of *isibara*, fever tree, is taken in warm water for malarial fever. Also for fever there is used a decoction of the leaves of

Umsobo, nightshade, (*Solanum nigrum*). A decoction of the whole plant *Umkwenkwe* (*Pittosporum viridiflorum*) is taken as an emetic for bronchitis and consumption. The powdered roots of *Umunga*, a kind of mimosa (*Acacia horrida*), is taken in warm water for pneumonia. The emetic roots of *Idhlebe lendhlovu* (*Rhyncosia sigmoides*) are taken in great quantity for pains in the chest. The bark of the *Umfusamvu* tree, in the bush country (*Pittosporum viridiflorum*), for fever; the roots of *Umatunga* (*Cyrthantus obliquus*) for chest complaints. Also for chest complaints are used the roots of *Ugobo* (*Gunnera perpensa*) and *Uboqo*, a kind of convolvulus (*Ipomoea ovata*), and *Idumbi lika 'nhloyile* (*Haemanthus Natalensis*) and *Inkonazana*, a certain running veldt-herb (*Atysicarpus Wallichii*), and many other plants which are used by the Zulus as emetics for colds, fevers and different chest complaints.

But, as a rule, very little discretion is used as to a regulated strength and quantity of the emetics used, and, in consequence, the medicine being powerful, very often too strong, moves the whole system causing vomiting as well as looseness of the bowels.

This happens especially in the case of emetics taken for removing superfluous gall which is according to the belief of the Natives at the bottom of a great number of diseases. As often as biliousness, caused by want of change in food, is suspected, by reason of some beginning *umkuhlane* (cold or fever), an emetic for removing the superfluous gall is used — e. g. the powdered roots of the *Isinama* (*Panicum verticillatum*). Plenty of the herb and not much water is required. Or *Uhlunguhlungu* (*Vernonia corymbosa*); or *Utshwala bwenyoni*, a species of *leonotis*; or the powdered bark of the *Umsenge*, cabbage tree, taken in water; or the bark of the *Umtolo*, mimosa tree.

Emetics are further taken to remove a feeling of being poorly, and to give one an appetite.

Emetrical tonics are: The *Inkamamasane* (*Euphorbia pugniformis*), or the roots of *Itshongwe*, milk shrub (*Xysmalobium lapathifolium*).

Young people, before going courting, use a love-potion or medicinal charm, which is mostly taken as an emetic. Such emetrical love potions are made of the creepers *Ubububu* or the *Izazo* or *Ibuta elincane* (its powdered roots taken in a great quantity of cold water), or *Uguqu* or the *Isiwisa* (*Helichrysum aureonitens*) or *Ukalimele*, a certain forest climbing plant, or the tubers of the *Uvuma* (*Vigna triloba*) or the veldt-plant *Ubane*. These emetics are believed to have the power of attracting the hearts of girls, when courted by the young lover, who has purified his blood and made himself look nice and lovable by means of such a charm. Since there is no longer any glory to be obtained by way of fighting, where the young Zulu man may show his superiority, he does it now-adays by these means, and glories in his charms being so effective, and in his power over the hearts of the weaker sex. Married women, likewise, are accustomed to take from time to time an emetic in order to increase the mutual affection between themselves and their husbands.

Emetics are also used as antidote for snake-bite, and with success; so much so, that in most cases, where the antidote is taken shortly after the accident, the patient is cured. Specifics for snake-bite are: *Imunyane*, red dagga (*Leonotis leonurus*); *umcwili*, klip-dagga, (*Leonotis ovata*); *Isidikili*, a small veldt plant (*Lasiosiphon Meisneri*), of which the roots only are used for the purpose; *Unungumabele* (*Zanthoxylon Capense*); *Isibiba*, nettle rash (*Urticaria*), which is especially a valuable antidote for *mamba*-bite.

Other occasions for taking an emetic may be mentioned. For example, when somebody thinks that he has been given some poison in food or drink, or after having sustained a great physical or moral shock, as in the case of a fall, or on the death of relatives. In both cases emetics are used in order to regulate the disturbed blood. Fear, too, and palpitation, or bad dreams, are removed by emetics. For hysterics a species of iris (*Belamcanda punctata*), called *indawoluti*, is used. Lastly, evil-doers (*abatakati*) make themselves invisible by taking as emetic the bulb of the veldt plant *insulusula*; and those who are in fear of mischief done to them by evil-doers take as emetic-antidote the decoction of a wild lily called *ilabateka*.

2. Enemas.



Upondo Lokukata. Horn for injecting an enema into a grown up person.



Uhlanga Lokucata. Reed for injecting an enema in the case of children.

The reed for injecting an enema into a child is from six to ten inches long, according to the age of the child for which it is used; and the piece of ox-horn used for adults is about nine inches long. The boiled decoction of medicinal herbs is put into the horn or reed and forcibly blown into the body. Enemas are administered by mothers to their children, or by men to men and by women to women. In case of children a mother often takes the tiny patient up by the legs and shakes the medicine thoroughly into the system of the screaming baby.

Enemas are principally used as astringents to stop diarrhoea or dysentery. For this purpose the ground bark of *Acacia horrida*, *umunga* or of the *isingawe*, a mimosa tree with long white thorns, is used.

For colic and any acute pain in the stomach an injection of *umkuhlu* (*Strychnos Mackenii*) or *iboza* (*Moschosma riparia*) or *ibozane* (*Buddleia salviaefolia*) or the roots of *utangazane* (*Luffa sphaerica*) is made use of.

Other enemas act like purgatives, as the roots of *umshehisane* (*Euclea lanceolata*). To newly-born children an infusion of the crushed roots of *amasabele* (*Euphorbia pugniformis*) mixed with warm cow-milk is administered for cleansing their stomach. For painful menstruation (*isilumo*) enema of the bark of thornbush tree (*ingwavuma*) is employed.

In some cases of fever enema is used. The *ikokwane* (*Alepidea sp.*) is used in this way.

3. Taken internally.

Decoctions of herbs are taken internally as purgatives.

Inkomankoma, a species of fern (*Nephrodium athamanticum*) is the chief medicine for tapeworm. The powdered roots are taken on an empty stomach in half a cup of milk or water.

The juice of the leaves of *umhlaba* (*Aloe ferox*), mixed with meal, forms a pill for constipation.

The boiled roots of *idolo lenkonyane* (literally, the calf's knee) (*Rumex Eckloni*) are taken in sweet milk for round worms.

Decoction of the roots of *incamu* (*Othonna Natalensis*) is given as a vermifuge to children.

The powdered bark of the root of the so-called fever-tree (*isibara*) is taken in warm water for malarial fever and as an expectorant.

The powdered bark of the forest-tree *umqaloti* (*Strychnos Henningsii*) is taken in cold water for pain in the stomach, colic and round worms.

For scrofula (*umzimb'omubi* — bad-body) a decoction of the bark of *umbangandhlala* (*Heteromorpha arborescens*) is taken in warm water; or he boiled root of the *umduze*, Natal lily, in hot water; or a decoction of the root of *umlahlankosi* (literally "he who buries the chief", from its being used to cover the grave of the chief, *Zyzyphus mucronata*); or a mixture of three plants: a forest creeper *umdhlonzo*, *umtombo* (*lissampelos torulosa*) and *ikatazo*, all three boiled in water.

4. Taken internally by sucking from the tips of the fingers.

Liquid medicines are sometimes taken very hot by dipping the fingers of one or both hands into a shallow basin containing the medicine, and sucking some from the tips of the fingers. This process is called *ukuncinda* and is adopted in taking the antidotes, for instance, *Isidawu*, a species of *Encephalartos*, which is taken in the *ukuncinda* way, by a person who thinks that he has stepped over an *umbulelo*,¹ and has in consequence contracted some disease.

Another antidote, taken in the same manner as the *isidawu*, is called *imbuyabatwa*, and is roasted over the fire and taken mixed with the blood of a fowl or sheep.

5. Chewed.

Some medicines are chewed. For tooth-ache there is chewed the bark of *umtombo* (*Cissampelos torulosa*). For foul breath the bitter roots (with a ginger-like taste) of *indawu*, a kind of cypress, are carried in beads round the neck for nibbling at when required.

Other medicines and charms are chewed and afterwards spat out. As an instance of this may be cited the lightning charm *umtunyelelwa* (*Cathastrum*

¹ An *umbulelo* is any injurious medicine placed in a kraal or along paths by an evil-doer (*umtakati*) in order to bring disease upon those who should step over them, according to Zulu belief.

Capense). During a storm a man or woman may be seen chewing the roots of this plant and then spitting it towards the sky in the direction of the storm, shouting at the same time, again and again: "*Nang' umtunyelelwa, nang' umtunyelelwa*, see the messenger, see the messenger." A kind of iris, called *ingqunda*, is chewed and spit in the direction of the place of the person against whom a native has a case in court, in order that he should loose the case.

6. Snuffed.

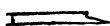
For head-ache and neuralgia, especially, the natives have some valuable remedies in the form of snuff, which makes one sneeze many times and clears the head, at once, of cold and pain. In this way the powdered bark of a forest tree *umkwangu* is taken as snuff for head-ache, or the powdered root of *iyeza* (*Anemone Caffra*).

7. Inhaled.

The leaves of the forest creeper *umdhlonzo* are rubbed between the hands and the scent inhaled for head-ache.

8. Poured into the nose or ears or eyes.

For pouring medicines into the nose, or ears, or eyes of a patient, a small reed, about two inches long, with one end closed and the other end cut to resemble a writing pen or quill, is used. A small quantity of water,



in which a certain forest climbing-plant *ukalimele* has been boiled, is poured into the nose for head-ache; and is said to be a sure remedy. *Imunyane* (*Leonotis leonurus*) is likewise used for head-ache.

The juice of the crushed leaves of *ikakasi* (*Berkheya sp.*) is poured into sore eyes. The powder of the roots of *ugwayana* (small tobacco plant, from its resemblance to the tobacco plant) is also applied to sore eyes.

The juice of the leaves of *inkonazana* (*Atysicarpus Wallichii*) is poured into the nose for hysterics; and a decoction of its leaves is poured into ears for running or tumour in the ear.

9. Rubbed on.

The milky juice of *isihlehle*, a species of *Euphorbia*, is rubbed on warts. A paste of decocted *udonqa* (*Sesamum Indicum*) is a good remedy for sores of the skin. For ringworm a paste of *umsobo*, nightshade (*Solanum nigrum*), or the milky juice of *intsema* (*Euphorbia pugniformis*) is put on.

10. Poultices.

The leaves of the *umlahlankosi* (*Zyzyphus mucronata*), previously mentioned, make useful poultices for glandular swellings; and the wild hemp *insangu* (*Cannabis sativa*) is used for poulticing tumours.



11. Inoculation and cupping. (See the pictures.)



Sharpened iron to make incisions in the skin for inoculation. The point of an ox-horn is used for cupping and is called *upondo lokulumeka*. It is about three inches long, or a third of the *upondo lokucata*, described above, No. 2 Enemas.

In some cases both operations are performed. First, a number of incisions are made. With the thumb and first finger of the left hand the surgeon pinches the skin of the arm or leg or shoulder or body, and cuts it with the *intsingo*. After three or four incisions have been made close together, he places the short horn over them and draws the blood strongly with the mouth. Finally, the ashes of some medicinal root, or bark, or leaves are rubbed in. This is done in case of snake-bite round the bitten place. The names of the plants have been mentioned above under the heading for emetics for snake-bite.

Medicines are also rubbed into incisions for sprains, fractures or stitch. The ashes of *umtuma* (*Solanum melongena*) are valuable for making broken bones grow and join again. The same qualities exist in the "bitter apple" (*Solanum sodomaeum*). For sprains the ashes of *umyenye* (*Rhamnus primoides*) are rubbed in, and for stitch the ashes of the roots of *uhlanga* or *uhlabanhlanzi*, a kind of grass resembling the tambootie. In stitch and similar cases, where there is an acute pain in the chest, bleeding from the incisions is believed to lessen the pain.

12. Steamed out and sprinkled on etc.

Another way of treating some kinds of disease, particularly rheumatism, fever and insanity is the process of steaming out.

The patient is seated over a large pot of boiling medicines and surrounded on all sides by grass-mats and blankets. After the sick person is thoroughly steamed, he is sprinkled all over the body with the same or another similar decoction while it is boiling hot. Many charms, too, are sprinkled; for instance, a decoction of the plant *umyenye* (*Rhamnus primoides*) is sprinkled about in the kraal at the time of a big drinking-feast, in order that the people should not begin quarrelling.

The water in which the *intolkwane* (*Elephantorhiza Burchellii*) has been boiled is sprinkled on Kafir-corn-fields when they are in flower, so as to increase the crops. A decoction of certain plants is sprinkled about the kraal in order to hinder evil-doers (*abatakati*).

Warriors before going to war are sprinkled with a decoction of different plants. One of the war-charms, the water of which is sprinkled on the warriors, is called *inkungwini* i. e. "in the fog"; another, *impi aiboni* "the enemy does not see", because according to Zulu belief, which is preserved

among them by their war-doctors, who are always men, these charms make the assegais invisible, they envelope the enemy in a mysterious fog, so that they are not able to see what they are doing. The warriors have also to wash themselves with the decoction of such war-charms, and to wear them in beads round the neck.

Other medicines and charms are worn at all times round the neck for good luck, as antidotes for snake-bite, or as love-charms. Some people wear these remedies round the wrists or ankles.

13. Miscellaneous.

There are still other ways of applying medicinal plants and charms. The leaves of *iloyi* (*Stramonium*) are used as a plaster for sores; but if put into the food, it is said to cause insanity. *Inkomfe* (*Hypoxis Rooperi*) is put into the drinking water for sick fowls. The powdered root of *ijigijolo* (*Rubus rigidus*), blackberry-bush, is put into the teeth for mumps. The red knot of the roots of *isidwa* (*Gladiolus Ludwigii*) if put between the seed at the planting time secures a good harvest. A common veldt-plant called *nhlambapetsheya*, "who crosses the sea", is burned during a storm, as a remedy against lightning.

* * *

Many of above-mentioned plants have undoubtedly a considerable medicinal virtue. Every native medical man has, of course, his own stock of plants and is very careful to keep his knowledge to himself. Therefore, on an excursion for the purpose collecting medicinal plants, he goes by himself and keeps his medicines carefully hidden, under a cover of long grass, tied together with strings of the same material. He then pounds them up on a stone and fills his goat-horns, as shown in the above two illustrations. For teaching another person one single valuable medicine he would demand not less than a goat or even an ox. As to the fees asked by a doctor the rule is: "no cure no pay". But they ask a fee before they open their horns or bag. Should the patient recover, the final fee is one or more head of cattle.

In the time of the Zulu kings Tshaka, Dingane, Pande, Cetshwayo i. e., 1800--1879, medical men as well as witch-doctors, male or female, were allowed to practise with the permission of the king. Anyone not having this royal permission, and found in possession of medicines or charms, was killed together with his family, the children only being left alive. For examining the witch-doctors Tshaka used to inform a favourite induna of his purpose. An ox was killed, and he himself sprinkled its blood about the kraal. All the witch-doctors (*izangoma*) were then called in and asked by the king about the blood, as to where it came from and what it meant. One would say that an evil-doer had been there and sprinkled the blood; another would say it was done by the *amadhlozi* (spirits); a third would deny these two explanations and declare that heaven (*izulu*), i. e. the king

himself, had sprinkled the blood and that there was nothing to be feared in consequence. The king then would praise the last witch-doctor and condemn the others, and not allow them to continue their practice as witch-doctors.

After 1879, a great influx of medicines, charms and poisons, hitherto unknown to the Zulus, came from Tongaland; and the superstitious practices of the Tongas were adopted to a greater or lesser extent by the Zulus, in addition to their own. Then every native began to have medicines and charms about his kraal and person. Even a young man going courting carried his charms or antidotes, fearing that other youths might interfere in his affairs and use injurious medicines on him. At the approach of, and during a storm and vivid lightning, any kraal-head may now be seen chewing medicinal charms and spitting in the direction of the stormy clouds.

But although the use of medicines and charms has become almost universal, those who desire to practise openly, and charge fees from their patients, can do so without undergoing any examination, by paying three pounds stg, per annum, for the license to practice as a medical man. As a rule, the native doctors make heavy charges for their services, and native patients, now adays, prefer European medicines and doctors to their own—except in cases where they attribute the illness to the spirits (*amadhlozi*) or to an evil-doer (*umtakati*). For instance, dropsy is supposed to be caused by an *umtakati*; and blood-running from the nose and stitch are believed to be the work of the *amadhlozi*. In such cases they stick superstitiously to their doctors, and still more to their witch-doctors.

In order to pacify the angry spirits, which have brought illness, a beast is sacrificed, a goat or ox of a colour mentioned by the witch-doctor. According to the ridiculous belief of the people it is a sure sign that a certain disease is caused by the spirits if the beast makes water shortly before being slaughtered. Should this not happen the illness is said to be caused by an evil-doer (*umtakati*). The *isangoma* (witch-doctor) has an extraordinary power over the Zulu mind and heart. What a witch-doctor says must be so, even though their own eyes were to convince them that it is not as the *isangoma* says.

By English law, witch-craft is prohibited; but in out-of-the-way places, even now, it is practised all over Natal and Zululand. Many a child disappears, and even grown up people are secretly killed in order to obtain parts of their body which are believed to possess a great value in the preparation of medicines and charms.

This article, on medicines and charms, makes no pretence to deal adequately with the objectionable practices of witch-doctors and evil-doers. The writer confines himself to a description of the ordinary use of medicinal plants and vegetable charms as they are used by all the Zulus in their daily lives.

(To be continued.)