

A NATIVE DOCTOR AND HIS PRESCRIPTIONS.

By E.B.-H.

Those who live on East African farms know what it is to be pestered continually by natives for *dawa* for every sort of ailment, and it was a surprise to me to find that most natives know something about herbal remedies, and that among them are "doctors," though these do not appear to be "medicine men."

An old man, father of one of our squatters, is a doctor by heredity, his father and grandfather having been in the profession before him. Though most of his medicines are herbs, some are charms, and it was his grandfather who discovered the infallible cure for lumbago—two small vertebrae of a python's tail, knotted up in the blanket and worn night and day.

He told me the properties of a number of plants, on my undertaking not to use them or steal his practice, and to pay him a good-sized blanket as a fee.

There were several remedies for *kifua* (diseases of the chest). *Yakinja* (this is said to be good for distemper in dogs), a species of Sodom apple, the roots of which are boiled and the liquor drunk to cure colds on the chest; the roots of the red Jasmine (*Carrissa*), the prickly variety, are bruised and boiled and eaten for *kifua*; and the roots of a Cassia that grows near water, bruised and steeped and the liquor drunk, is a sovereign remedy for anyone very ill with pneumonia. Among the Kakamega and Kabras the leaves of the same plant, dried and pounded, are applied to burns. The leaves of a very common species of Combretum are bruised and steeped and the liquor drunk as a cough cure. The roots of a thistle with a large red globe flower, *Echinops amplexicaulis*, are boiled and made into poultices for the chest, and the leaves of a wild ?*Auralia* are bruised and steeped and the liquor taken as a remedy for whooping-cough.

Chepsabaya is a species of wild asparagus; the stems are bruised and boiled and the liquor given to very small babies to cure stomach ache. If this is not effective, the root of the wild white-flowered Bauhinia tree, boiled, is added to the decoction, together with the leaves of Lantana, and probably the mixture is the cause of much infant mortality! The roots of a Pentansia species, bruised and boiled, are given as a purgative both to children and adults. The roots of the small common Sorrel (*Oxalis corniculata*) are mixed with water and taken for fever, also for stomach ailments; and the roots of a Polygala species are eaten raw for stomach ache. The doctor assured me that this last is a very convenient *dawa*, for if you

were seized with pain when herding your cattle and far from help, you could find this root almost anywhere.

The leaves of the wild carrot may be chewed and the pulp applied to the temples for headache; and the ash of burnt rock lichen is an unfailing cure for the terrible ulcers natives get from neglected sores.

For enlarged spleen the roots of *Cluytia abyssinica* are bruised and boiled and the liquor drunk, also the roots of *Clerodendron myricoides*, prepared in the same manner. The common East African "old man's beard" (*Clematis sp.*), that grows everywhere, is also a febrifuge, the root boiled and liquor drunk; and the leaves of a Rubis species, *Kepsotaliet*, pounded and eaten for the same purpose.

The leaves of a yellow flowered plant (I think a *Helychrysum*) are boiled and the liquor drunk for stitch, and the juice of the hairy leaved blue *Goigoiyot* (a Commelina) is good for sore eyes. The leaves of another *Helychrysum* (*H. gerberifolia*) are crushed and given as a febrifuge to calves; the juice of the leaves of the common wild sisal (*Aloes*), *makakwa*, is a cure for bad eyes in cattle; and the roots of the yellow flowered Bauhinia creeper, boiled, and the liquor administered to cows just before calving, will cause them to give quantities of milk. Anyone knowing native cows will realise that this *dawa* is not generally known.

The doctor, who is of the Munyore sub-tribe and speaks Nandi, told me that he knew many more herbs and had specifics for every illness under the sun, but he could not show them to me because many grew in the Nandi forest country and he could not find them here. I told him I was surprised that the natives on the farm came to me for *dawa*, knowing me to be only an amateur, when all the time they had such a learned physician at their service. "Ah!" memsahib," he answered, "you give your medicines free, but I charge a fee for mine; and though these men know my *dawa* is good, they would rather die than pay for it, when they can get doctored by you for nothing!"