

8.309(28)

A13/7/13

K32/13

1  
TH.

0.1-1b  
Tr 1b

J. R. S. Masiangoako.

*Medical Practices of the Swana.*

**Doctors :** There are two kinds of doctors - there are the hornless ones and also those that have horns. Women are just ordinary doctors, not like the men. They doctor ordinary diseases of little children, those are the diseases the women are able to doctor. The hornless doctors are those that have no divining bones, that is to say they doctor the disease which a person describes himself, because they cannot examine a person with divining bones. Some of the hornless doctors are those that doctor cattle, in most cases they understand the art of doctoring. If a person describes his ailment, they are in a position to know what medicine to give him for it and how they will doctor him. The doctors that have horns, are those that throw divining bones or hoofs of oxen. They decide by casting bones, what the nature of the disease is one is suffering from. They are not equal in knowledge, there are the most experienced in the casting of bones and in the doctoring. Those that have a thorough knowledge are experts, that is to say, if they have doctored a place, and a person tries to practise witchcraft, he will find his nails crooked. The doctors themselves are afraid of each other, the smaller ones are afraid of the greater ones. One has to be trained for medical practice. Some inherit it from their fathers if one's father was a doctor before his death. A person who inherits medical practice from his father, is one who had always been sent by his father to dig medicines and one who had been shown what diseases this or that medicine could cure. That is the one who inherits, and not an untrained child. If the one who has not inherited medical practice wishes to be a doctor, he can learn it on his own. Some of the doctors cure cattle diseases and others fail to cure them.

Diseases/.....

Diseases like blackleg and anthrax are only known by certain doctors, others do not know them. If a person's cattle die from anthrax and blackleg, he looks for a doctor who knows how to cure them, it may be even an ordinary person who is not a doctor. There are doctors also who cure children's diseases. If one learns medical practice, one does not learn it from a single person only, but from many when one starts, one learns from a single person only. When a person has learned the divining bones and medicines, he is given a horn in which he puts in his drugs. He then parts with the doctor who is teaching him and he goes on learning medicines from other people. On several occasions when a person begins to learn medical practice, he goes about with a doctor who is teaching him; he casts the divining bones for the doctor and watches how he diagnoses and how he cures a disease. After this, the experienced doctor sends the learner doctor to any place he is called to if he himself is too busy to attend. On his return, he must explain how he doctored the patient as well as the nature of the disease. If the patient is too ill, the experienced doctor must go himself to see the nature of the disease. Even if the patient is not very sick, the experienced doctor has to go to see how the learner is doing his work. When he sees that he knows his job, he asks him to pay a beast for teaching him the divining bones, the medicines, the art of curing diseases and finally for giving him the horn in which to keep the drugs. When one learns to be a doctor, he takes any length of time that will be sufficient for him to know the job, it sometimes takes one, two, three or even four years. If the learner does not wish to part with the experienced doctor, he remains with him as long as he likes. If he wishes to part with him, he does so when he thinks he knows the divining bones, the medicines and when he feels that the people know that he is a good doctor. When he is sent out by his doctor, he does his best and the patient recovers. It is then that he parts

with/.....

with the doctor who taught him when he feels that he can be independent. Tswana doctors do not form a partnership, each one is independent. Doctors are known by the skin hats of animals which they put on and by their uncut hair. He gets his divining bones and medicines during his learning period. He learns about others at a later period, from other doctors. These he pays for.

Practice : The doctor cures persons at any time he likes. The villagers go personally to him, he does not go after the people. This means that they should know the doctor and the doctor should have his customers. When they meet with an accident, they go to him. He also visits children and by doing so he becomes known by the people. They tell others that he is a good doctor and that he will help them. If he has cured a person who was very sick, when that person has recovered, the doctor is paid a beast. This beast is paid once and for all. No other payment is demanded afterwards. If there is sickness again and the doctor treats the sick person, he does not ask for any further payment. If they leave him and go to another doctor, that doctor will demand a beast as it will be his first time to doctor there. Sometimes a doctor goes to other villages to establish his practice there. On entering a village, his duty is to go to the Chief to report that he has come as a doctor. If the Chief agrees, he tells him to go on with his practice but he also tells him that the first beast he gets as payment must be brought to the kgotla. The Chief then tells the people that a doctor is here at the kgotla, anyone who wants him should come there. When a doctor goes to establish his practice in a village, in the river which he crosses on approaching the village, he catches a small frog and puts it in a leather bottle with medicines in it. He shuts the bottle. When this frog gets suffocated, a person in the village becomes ill.

When/.....

When the doctors are reported, they are at the same time called to go and doctor someone, now that is to say, this sickness is one that is brought by them, and the patient is cured by them in a very short time. Sometimes there are deceitful doctors.

Actual case. A certain man by the name of Rantleru discovered that doctors were paid in cattle, he took bones and said they were divining bones; he ground medicines into powders and mixed them with fat and said they were drugs. He then started to practice as a doctor. When he entered the first village, he did not go to the Chief to report himself. In the first house he entered, he found a child who was very ill suffering from 'setsoafu' - (solar plexus). Rantleru knew how 'setsoafu' was doctored. He told the people that if he failed to cure this child, he would throw away his divining bones. They then asked him to doctor the child. He then got a black sacrificial goat, this was slaughtered. He took some of its meat and mixed them with medicines and threw this into the pipe of an ant-heap. When he had done that, he took medicines which he knew would cure 'setsoafu'. He then doctored the child. After four days, the child began to play. When the child completed a week's time, it was better and at the end of a month the child was completely cured. When the people noticed that the child had recovered, they believed that Rantleru was a real doctor. He was paid a beast. Another man whose wife was sick, got information about Rantleru. He hastened to him and asked him to come and see his wife. When Rantleru arrived, he examined the woman and said that it was only a small matter. The man then asked him to doctor her for him. Rantleru cast his divining bones and said she was bewitched by a woman whose tribal totem was a monkey. She had taken her foot, that is to say, where this woman had trodden, she picked up some earth. Rantleru said that a black sheep was required. When it had been slaughtered, he took some of its meat, mixed it with medicines and began to doctor her, touching

here/.....

here and there but it was of no avail. Later they told Rantleru that they were going to get another doctor. They left him and went to get another doctor. He came and cast his divining bones and then stated that the woman had stomach trouble. He began to doctor her and at the end of a week, the woman began to get up on her feet. By the end of a month, the woman was completely cured. When Rantleru noticed that the woman had recovered, he came to demand a beast for his medicines. The husband of this woman refused and said, "I told you when I went to look for another doctor and furthermore, you said that my wife had been bewitched and that doctor said that she had stomach trouble, he has doctored her and she has recovered. As far as you are concerned, you failed to cure the witchcraft. Rantleru went to the Chief and told him that he had doctored a woman and her husband refused to pay him. The Chief asked Rantleru the doctor to explain where he came from, and how he entered the village. Rantleru did not know what to say to the Chief. While he stood in wonder, the Chief called the man whose wife was ill in order that he should tell him about Rantleru. On his arrival, he explained that Rantleru had treated his wife and had failed to cure her and how he had described the nature of the disease. When he had finished speaking, the Chief called his own doctors to come and see if Rantleru was a real doctor. On their arrival they cast their divining bones in the presence of the Chief and Rantleru. They then asked him what the divining bones revealed. Rantleru was unable to explain. The Chief then told Rantleru to take out his medicines and the horn containing his drugs. When he had done so, some of the doctors explained that there were powders mixed with milk fat. The Chief became enraged and said that Rantleru has for a long time been robbing people and now he deserves to be put to death. The men then went out with him on a hunting expedition. When they got to the veld, they killed him and went back home. At his home

they/.....

they awaited his return, but he never turned up again, even today he has not come back. There are some who know that he was killed at the village of the Barokologadi while he was deceiving them and calling himself a doctor.

When a doctor casts divining bones, he should do so in the 'lapa' or in the house. That is done so that the people should not see what is going on. When a doctor casts divining bones, he does not question the people, he tells them his findings first and he asks afterwards if it is not so. If it is as he finds it, they will say it is so, and if it is not so they will reply in the negative. When the doctor has finished casting bones, he takes out an expiation, it is called the track of the divining bones. If they want him to doctor their sick person, they will tell him to begin to do so and if he has all the medicines on him, he begins forthwith. If he hasn't got them he will begin the next day or in the afternoon when the sun goes down. When he begins doctoring, before he unlooses his bag of medicines, he must state what he wants for opening his bag. When he has told them, he then begins to do his job, but this is not payment, payment will be made afterwards when the patient has been cured. Payment for opening the medicine bag is a goat or a sheep, it is just as the doctor wants. If a person has been sick for a long time, the doctor is paid a beast. The doctor says that it cost him a lot of trouble to get the patient cured. If it is not a serious illness, he asks for just a sacrificial animal. If he places medicines for the protection of a kraal, he demands a beast, this applies also to a cattle kraal. Even if he prepares a horn for drugs for one's home, payment for that is also a beast. It is because he will have strengthened the person against all evils. But when a person is cleansed he does not pay a beast, he pays a goat or a sheep, it is slaughtered and the contents of its stomach are mixed with medicines and the person washes himself with that chyme. Now bad luck and misery will disappear from him. The payment for all doctors is a beast and not more. If

a/.....

a doctor has cured a person and he fails to pay him, the doctor has the right to take him to court. Further, a person should not argue with a doctor if the doctor has cured him. His duty is just to get the beast and pay. If he has not been cured, the doctor has no right to demand payment because that person is still sick. His people are still going to spend more on other doctors. The doctors know that they must treat a person until he has completely recovered. Then they can demand their payment, but before that, they dare not.

Actual Case : Ramatsidinkane once doctored the sick child of a man named Nakedi, the child was a young man, and when the young man had been cured of the disease he was suffering from, which was epilepsy, Nakedi refused to pay Ramatsidinkane. Ramatsidinkane waited in vain for Nakedi to pay him. Eventually he took the matter to the 'kgotla'. He told the Chief that Nakedi had refused to pay him. The chief asked Ramatsidinkane what the child was suffering from. He stated that the child was suffering from epilepsy. He has now recovered and he no longer faints, but now when I ask his father to pay me, he is refusing. The Chief called Nakedi to come and say why he failed to pay the doctor after he had cured his child. When Nakedi came to the 'kgotla', he was asked if Ramatsidinkane had cured his child. Nakedi agreed that his child was ill and suffering from epilepsy he said now the child has recovered after being doctored by Ramatsidinkane. The Chief asked him why Ramatsidinkane says you refuse to pay him. Nakedi stated that he was not unwilling, he was going to pay him. The Chief asked if he had told him that he was prepared to pay. Nakedi said, "No I did not tell him". The Chief asked him why he had done so after someone had helped his child. Nakedi scratched his head. The Chief asked, "Do you know that when a doctor has doctored you, you must thank him?" Nakedi said, "I know that Motlhako". The Chief said, "If you know that, we fine you four head of cattle instead of one." Judgment was that Nakedi should pay four head of cattle, three were for the 'kgotla' and the fourth was given to

Ramatsidinkane/.....

Ramatsidinkane; those of the "kgotla were consumed there. The Chief told the people that if a doctor gave a person medicine and got him cured of his illness, that doctor should be paid. "You must not make a fool of a doctor after he has helped you. But if you have not been cured then you cannot pay him because you are still going to loose more on other doctors which you will get. He also told the doctors that, "If you give a person medicines, and demand payment before he recovers, that person should not pay you, he is still sick and he still wants doctors."

Diagnosis: The doctors find the sickness out by divining bones, that is to say, if a person is sick, they will tell him what his sickness is. Sometimes when a person sets out on a journey and he wants to know if the journey will be a good one, he gets a doctor to cast divining bones in order to tell whether the journey is alright. Sometimes when he throws the bones he may find this person to be ill or he may find that he will get ill or meet some other misfortune. The doctor will then explain these things to him he will say that the journey is alright, if he is sick, he will also tell him that, "You are setting out on a journey, but you are sick" or he may say "you will meet with trouble." These divining bones have many names. Some say this and others that as they are thrown down. Some of them go so far as to tell what a person never thought of. That is why some people say that our doctors tell lies. A person is diagnosed by a doctor with the divining bones. The sick person must pick up the divining bones with his own hands and breathe on them before throwing them down. The doctor will then begin to describe and explain them, at the same time praising them as far as his knowledge goes, and calling them by their names. Here are the names of the divining bones :-

- Baboon - represents those whose tribal totem is a baboon.
- Monkey - represents those whose tribal totem is a monkey.
- Elephant- represents those whose tribal totem is an elephant.

Ant bear/.....

- Ant bear - represents those whose tribal totem is an ant bear.  
 Crocodile- represents those whose tribal totem is a crocodile.  
 The Shoe - represents the travellers.  
 God - represents the spirits.  
 The Porcupine - represents those whose tribal totem is a porcupine.  
 The sea - represents the sea.

Some doctors keep many divining bones; they are known only to them. Each doctor praises them according to his own knowledge and according to the way he was taught. Here is a praise song: They say I am a boy, things go well with the boy; the boy kills a red hare and gets astonished; the boy kills roebuck and beats the others.

Bare:- Mosimane o siameloa ke dilo.  
 Mosimane o bolaea tlholoe a tlholloe.  
 Mosimane o bolaea phala a phale ba bangoe.

When divining bones are shaped, doctors take the bones of a slaughtered animal which have not been cooked. They are the right ones. They are not good if they have been cooked. They say that they have lost their strength, and cannot explain anything. The divining bones do not tell a disease only, they tell everything. If your beast has gone astray or if you have lost something, they will tell you whether you will recover it or not. Even if the wizards worry you, they will tell you.

Actual Case : A certain man by the name of Matlankobane got up one morning to find the tail of his bull cut. He did not know who had cut it. He went to call a doctor. The doctor came and when he cast his divining bones, he said, "I am aware of the incident of the Bull's tail, but the difficulty is this, the people have buried a bean at the gateway and when this bean begins to grow, you will all die. Matlankobane said, "Show us where it is." The doctor went along and said, "Dig here". Whilst they were digging, they saw it. The doctor said, "There it is". Matlankobane then told the doctor to protect his house and cattle kraal with medicines. The doctor said that if he did so, the person who does evil will die. Matlankobane told the doctor to do the doctoring. The doctor began

his/.....

work and finished it and then told Matlankobane that he must watch. After about a month a certain woman died, after a week two children died, after three days the man, the owner of this house also died. That home was closed, the inmates having all died. The doctor came to Matlankobane and said, "You have seen what I have done, pay a beast. Matlankobane paid it immediately and with the greatest pleasure. He had realised that this doctor Rantsimane by name was a doctor indeed.

Manipulations and Treatment. When a person has a limb broken, he is bandaged. His bones are put together and bandaged with the inner barks of trees. When these inner barks of trees wear away, he will be healed. If he is only sprained, he is fomented with hot water. Grass is soaked in hot water and then it is pressed on the sprained part. Sometimes if the swelling does not diminish, binding is done with cow dung until the part is ripe and it is then cut open to let out the blood and ripe matter. If a person's arm is broken where it is impossible to bandage, it is amputated. That must be done immediately, and treated as far as their knowledge goes. The person attending him should take care that worms do not go in. If a person is pierced by a splint only, the wound is treated with cow dung and a drug is applied until it heals. If it is bound, it festers quickly, it becomes numb so that one does not feel much pain.

Knowledge of properties: These are the medicines :-

Mogato -  
 Masigomabe -  
 Lengana -  
 Sekaname -  
 Mogaga -  
 Monokomabele -  
 Mositatlou -  
 Mongolo -  
 Lesitloane -  
 Selaole -

The doctors call them charms or remedies or roots. Some are cooked, others are ground and mixed with water for one to drink. Some are mixed with fat for one to smear, it just depends on the person's sickness, and the manner in which doctors use their medicines. When a doctor diagnoses a person by casting divining bones, he gets to know which medicine he should give him and how to doctor him. If a person has stomach trouble, he is given medicine for stomach trouble, some medicines are boiled and mixed with water after they have been ground. These are for drinking.

Preparation of medicines: Medicines are dug at any time the doctor wishes to dig them. Some days, the doctor goes out to the veld to dig medicines, after that he pounds them, he stamps others in a mortar. He roasts the others and grinds them into powder. He puts them into pole cat and squirrel skins so that he may have his stock in hand when he is doctoring. Some are boiled during the person's illness, this is done two to three times. After that it is thrown away. Medicines are dug at any time, when a person wants medicine he just goes to dig it and he uses it at the same time. Some are kept as roots, without being ground or roasted. They are used when occasion demands, if it requires to be boiled he boils it and if it has to be ground, he grinds it and takes it. There is a special place for preparing medicines. Not every pot is used to cook it. The pot for cooking medicines is kept apart to avoid people using it. Some medicines are mixed just as the doctor prescribes. Tswana medicines are mostly those you have to drink. Every person who is taken ill is given medicine to drink. Every person who is taken ill is given medicine to drink. There are some medicines however which you have to wash yourself with. But if a person washes with medicine, it is when things do not go well with him. He washes in order to remove bad luck. There are some medicines also which are used for smearing. Protective medicines against witchcraft are charms or drugs. Incisions are made on the hands, feet, on the neck, shoulders, in fact on all the limbs of the body. The doctor makes incisions with a razor and afterwards he

rubs charms in. When he has scarified a person, he takes a bit from the drug and he gives him to swallow, he rubs underneath his feet with it so that one who tries to bewitch him by mixing medicines with the earth taken from where he trod may be unsuccessful, or get himself crippled. Some doctors after making incisions on a person, take a small skin and they wrap a charm in it and make the person to wear it round his neck. It protects him from being dazzled. The horn containing drugs is kept in the house, it is concealed and every child that is born must be treated with it and the cattle as well. Some-times the drug is smeared on the pegs which are knocked in the ground. This is done when a person makes the foundation of a house or builds a cattle kraal. These pegs guard against wizards and lightning.

#### Causes of diseases and misfortune.

There are many diseases the causes of which are unknown, but diseases brought about by witchcraft are men made. If a person does not like the other, he may bewitch with medicines which he knows that they will kill him if he applies them. Many people have died as a result of witchcraft.

Bad luck is caused by the Spirits, if a person disobeyed his fathers whilst they were still alive. That person will suffer on earth, he will be unsuccessful in all his undertakings. You will find him going this way and that way not knowing where actually he is going to. He will not have anything with which to help himself. Even if his parents had been rich in cattle and corn, these will scatter in a very short space of time.

Actual Case : A certain man by the name of Samuel had parents who were wealthy in cattle and corn, sheep and servants. But Samuel did not obey his parents right up to the time of his father's death. His mother died later. Samuel took charge of the cattle, he became very extravagant and negligent. In a very short space of time, their number had considerably decreased and even the servants eventually left. Today if you see him, you may think that he was born a pauper whose father had no cattle at all. This

is to say that the spirit of his father and mother had no rest. That was the reason for his being unlucky on earth.

Actual Case : There was another man also whose name was Phiri. His father loved him more than all his other children. On the arrival of the whitemen in this country, he went to work for them. Things went well with him, he worked hard until he became foreman and was very much liked by his employers. He travelled in a mule cart inspanning four; he collected cattle and became a well-to-do man. Then one day his father got very ill. When he was about to die, he wanted Phiri's presence. He sent a person to call him but Phiri did not come. He sent another one and yet another one but Phiri did not come. Eventually his father died. His father died with a grieved heart because he had not spoken to his child before his death. After the death of his father, the world turned against him. He wasted his possessions in a most astonishing way, he went about defrauding people and depriving them of their cattle. He grieved many people. From that time Phiri became a poor person and he possessed nothing and eventually he deserted his wife and children.

If a person is a wizard, people get a doctor for him and eventually they put him to death.

Diseases known : Stomach trouble, headache, Billiousness, Chest trouble, epilepsy and purpura. Stomach trouble is sometimes caused by eating too much, or by eating different kinds of food at the same time. If a person has stomachache, a certain edible root is ground for him, it is mixed with water and when he drinks this, the trouble stops. Bile is caused mostly by eating unripe fruit. When a person is billious, he is given a purgative to drink, the outer bark of the 'morekhuri' 'tamboetie boom' tree is cooked with soup and it is given to a person to take. It will loosen his stomach and he will vomit bile.

Purpura : It is bleeding which takes a long time to stop. The cause of it is unknown. There are people who know how to cure it,

not/.....

not doctors. Some doctors do not know what to cure it with. It is mostly cured by ordinary people who have been taught by their fathers. Some women know how to cure this bleeding.

Protective and other medicines : The charm which protects against evil is the drug horn. It is a very important drug as I have already said in the chapter dealing with the preparation of medicines. It is the foundation of a kraal, a house, cattle fold and the people as well. Even when a person goes to hunt, he smears his stick with the drug from his horn. Even when he goes to plough, he treats the seed with the drug, and after reaping too, he must treat his corn with the drug.

There are other charms which a person uses when he is working with others. They are 'leswalo' (a medicine to insure prosperity). This charm is to bring luck to a person, so that he must see what he is working for. There is a charm for grain, for cattle and one to make a person to be liked by others. If a person works without a charm, he cannot see what he is working for. He may get many things, but they will come to nought. He will never be prosperous. Eventually he will become a nonentity and keep on saying, "I was once a hard worker", not showing anything except talking by word of mouth.

END S. 309