

CHAP. XV.

UNION OF MEDICINE WITH MAGIC. SUPERSTITION OF
THE AFRICANS. GREEGREEES OR AMULETS. TREAT-
MENT OF SICK PERSONS TO AVOID THE EFFECT OF
WITCHCRAFT. PRACTICE OF OBI. ART OF POI-
SONING. "BLOWING".

THE unlettered but artful African, who, by the terrors of superstition, had gained an ascendancy over the minds of his countrymen, probably foresaw the additional influence which he would acquire by retaining in his own hands the care of their bodies also. Hence, the practice of medicine and the art of making greegreees and fetiches, in other words amulets, to resist the effects of witchcraft, or the malicious attempts of evil spirits, is generally the province of the same person. So strongly is the notion of medicine being a supernatural art imprinted on the minds of the people on the western coast of Africa, that they look upon every person who practises it as a witch, and are firmly persuaded that he can not only see and hold familiar conversation with evil spirits, whenever he pleases, but that he can give them a variety of commissions, which they never fail to execute. This notion is a source of great gain to the greegree makers, and of course they are at much pains to encourage it. Dr. Bancroft, speaking of a tribe of Indians called

Worror, says, "their physicians, or rather priests, are believed to have a particular influence with evil spirits above those of any other tribe." The dexterity and address of some of these people cannot be exceeded by the legerdemain tricks of their itinerant brethren in Europe. I have met with instances, at Sierra Leone, of persons who might be supposed to know better, being so far imposed upon by the grimaces and pretended magical ceremonies of one of these greegree men, as to believe that he had extracted from their sides the bottom of a *quart bottle*, which he produced at the time, and which he assured them had been conveyed there by some unfriendly witch, and had occasioned all their illness. A similar practice obtains among the inhabitants of Guiana, where the peii, priest and physician, pretends to extract the cause of the disorder by sucking the part which has been the most affected, and then pulls out of his mouth either fish bones, thorns, snake's teeth, or some such substances which he has before concealed in it, but which he affirms came from the seat of the disease, having been maliciously introduced there by the yowahoo*.

* Bancroft's Hist. of Guiana.

These instances of gross superstition have been adduced as proofs of stupidity in the African, and other uncultivated nations, without reflecting that not more than a century ago the same ridiculous notions very generally prevailed, and were universally credited, in Europe. Paracelsus, whose eccentricities frequently occasion a smile, appears to have believed implicitly in the power of witchcraft. What he has said upon this subject is curious, and presents a very exact picture of African superstition; and

Superstition no where exerts her baneful influence more powerfully than in Africa, where all ranks of people are deeply affected by it. The powers of witchcraft continually excite the appre-

his opinion of witches perfectly coincides with that of the Bulloins and Timmanees, "Nulla saga est quæ non summæ invidiæ et infidelitatis plena sit¹." In like manner he refers diseases to their evil machinations, "Frequenter etiam fit, ut repente in hominis alicujus corpore, tumores, vibices, et livores enascantur, aut universum ejus corpus lædatur non secus ac si baculis cæsum fuisset." Again he adds, "Evenit sæpius, ut homo aut altero aut utroque oculo cæcus, aut ex aure una vel utraque surdus, aut mutus, aut distortus, et claudus fiat, aut denique totaliter moriatur. Quæ omnia permissu Dei per hujusmodi incantatores patrantur." When such cases therefore occur, which have not been occasioned by any obvious cause, the patient is to be asked if he has not some enemy publicly suspected of practising magic; if he answers in the affirmative, it evidently arises from this cause. He next informs us how to cure these, by forming a waxen image, in the same manner as the obia professors in the West Indies.

Respecting the introduction of extraneous substances into the body, he adds, "Frequentius fit ut sub cutem corporis mittant, aut jaculentur stramen, setas, ramenta, coriorum detrimenta, glomos florum, ollarum fragmina, fusorum cuspides, floccos, spinas piscium, et similia his alia infinita. Tanta autem subtilitate talia iniro in corpus jaculantur, ut cutis nulla parte rumpatur aut aperiatur, quod quidem oculis videri possit." Bonetus² very gravely defends these absurdities, and asserts that demons are able to introduce themselves into the human body by a wound so dexterously made, and so instantly consolidated, as to be invisible. He further gives us some curious histories of these malicious sprites, who, he says, cannot be doubted to exist in the mines of Norway; and he even particularizes the contest of a demunculus with an unfortunate miner, who was much torn in the affray, and carried ever afterwards in his face the marks of the demon's nails. Ramazzini also says, "a metallurgo—accepi, fabulosum non esse, ut *putabam*, id quod de hujusmodi dæmunculis in fodinis stabulantibus tradunt³."

¹ De Sagis et earum Operibus.

² Medicina Septentrionalis.

³ De Morbis Artificum, p. 482.

bension of the natives, and frequently destroy their peace of mind. To guard against its so much dreaded effects, a variety of greegrees, fetiches, or amulets, are invented, which promise to the wearer perfect immunity from danger*. These

* The difference between an amulet and talisman is, that the former must be worn upon some part of the body, whereas the latter can exert its powers though placed at a distance. Amulets were called by the Romans *amolimenta*, ab *amoliendo*, because they were supposed to guard against disease. Pliny, speaking of the *succinum* or amber, says, "*hodieque Transpadanorum agrestibus feminis, monilium vice succina gestantibus, maxime decoris gratia, sed et medicinæ: quando tonsillis creditur resistere et faucium vitiiis;*" and again "*infantibus adalligari amuleti ratione prodect.*" Although these practices are in themselves highly absurd, yet their great antiquity and general prevalence among mankind seem to shew that they are natural to the human mind; nor is it surprising that men should practise means which readily suggest themselves, to soothe the mind with the flattering hope of procuring immunity from disease, or of discovering what futurity has in store for them. Pliny justly observes, to man *alone* is given "*immensa vivendi cupido, uni superstitio, uni sepulturæ cura, atque etiam post se de futuro.*" The first account which we have of amulets or greegrees is contained in the scriptures, where it seems probable that the *teraphim*, or images, as it is translated, which Rachel stole from her father were not idols to which a kind of worship was paid, but were greegrees, fetiches, or talismans. We cannot suppose that Laban actually worshipped idols, otherwise Isaac would not have sent his son Jacob to marry one of his daughters, as he was already so much displeased with Esau for having taken a wife from among the Canaanites. Laban, however, though not an idolater in the grosser sense of that term, might yet be much tinctured with the popular superstitions of his neighbours. Homer also takes notice of amulets; in the *Odyssey* we find Ulysses, when in danger of being shipwrecked upon the coast of Phæacia, has a greegree or "*ribbon to bind beneath his breast,*"¹ given to him by the goddess *Leucothœe* to preserve him from drowning. The Egyptians were much in the habit of wearing of amulets, and used to hang round the neck images of Har-

¹ Book IV.

greegrees are as various in their forms as in the substances of which they are composed. The Timmanees and Bulloms are of opinion, that by possessing a part of the body of a person who has been successful in his undertakings, they will also inherit a portion of his good fortune ; hence it was deemed necessary that the body of the late Mr. James Cleveland, of the Bananas, who had been a successful trader, and had raised himself to great power, should be buried in a secret manner, lest the natives should have converted it into greegrees. Those made by the Mahommedans consist of passages in the Koran, written upon paper in Arabic, sewed up in red leather, and neatly stamped on the outside. They are either of a square, triangular, round, or oblong form, and as there are greegrees against every possible danger, such as drowning, fire-arms, bites of snakes, wild beasts, sharks, &c. a person who is armed at all points with these charms appears almost sinking under their load. They are most frequently worn round the neck and arms ; sometimes as a girdle round the waist, and even round the legs. So strongly are they persuaded of the efficacy of these means of protection, that an African, a man of very superior mind, offered to allow a friend of mine, whose accuracy he had just been praising, to fire at him with a pistol charged with ball. It was proposed to him to

pocrates, Horus, Apis, Osiris, Isis, &c. from which they hoped to derive many advantages, as skill in divination, improvement in natural knowledge, increase of offspring, &c. &c.

hang his greegree round the neck of a sheep and allow the trial to be made, but this he refused, alleging they were designed for a man not for a sheep. Another, who placed equal confidence in a girdle of goatskin about an inch broad, would not have hesitated to throw himself naked into the sea, although he had seen a shark * close to him, but without his greegree he would not put his foot into the water, for fear of these voracious animals.

* Sierra Leone and the neighbouring rivers abound with sharks and alligators, which are extremely voracious, and are much dreaded by the natives. It is a curious fact, that upon the Kroo coast the natives have so little apprehension of sharks, that the children are constantly playing in the water; but when they remove to any distance from home, though it be only as far as Cape Mount, they are afraid of going into the water lest they should be devoured by sharks. At the Turtle Islands, in the Bay of Sherbro, according to Mr. Matthews, there never was an instance known of a shark attacking any one, though the children are constantly playing in the water. It is further said, that in the river Gallenhas (between Sherbro and Cape Mount) where alligators are in great abundance, there was not an instance upon record of any person being hurt by them, although the natives were much in the river, until a few years ago, when a slave ship blew up opposite its entrance. Monsieur Brue¹ says, at a village situated at the mouth of the Rio San Domingo (north of Sierra Leone) that the crocodiles hurt no person, and that children play with them, riding on their backs and sometimes beating them, without their showing the least resentment. The natives account for these circumstances by the great care they take to bury their dead, and all their offals, at such a distance from the sea side that the sharks cannot smell them. Among the Bulloms and Timmanees it is usual to refer even all accidents, as an alligator seizing upon a child whilst bathing in the river, or a leopard carrying off a goat, to the effects of witchcraft. They are of opinion that it is not a real leopard or alligator which has committed the de-

¹ Voyage a la Cote d'Afrique Occident.

The origin of amulets is lost in deep antiquity : the Jews had their phylacteries ; the Greeks their apotropaia, phylacteria, amynteria, periapta, periammata ; and the Romans had their phylacteria, amuleta, and præbia. The bullæ aureæ, worn by the Roman youth, and used as an insignium of triumph, and which often contained herbs supposed capable of resisting the effects of envy, were of the same nature. They had also præfiscini, or preservatives against fascination. It was usual among the ancients, when praising any one, to add, præfiscinè, i. e. sine fascino, to denote that the praise was sincere and given from no sinister motive. Africa appears to have been celebrated for every species of fascination and witchcraft : Pliny says, ‘ In eadem Africa familias quasdam effascinantium,—quorum *laudatione* intereant probata, arescant arbores, emoriantur infantes.’ The Arabians appear to have improved upon the superstitious practices of the Greeks and Romans, by inventing certain cabalistic and magical words, as abraxas, abracadabra, abracalan, &c. which they supposed

predation, but a witch under one of these assumed forms. A popular superstition of this kind probably gave rise to the story related by Herodotus of the Neuri, who were every year, at a certain time, changed into wolves for a few days * ; and we find a similar story occurring in Virgil

lecta venena,
 ——— nascentur plurima Ponte ;
 His ego sæpe lupum fieri, & se condere silvis
 Mærin, ——— Ecl. viii. 95.

The strength of the leopard is very great, Mr. Norris speaks of one which seized upon a fat sheep, and carried it off in an instant, by leaping over a wall eight feet high.

* Melpom. 105.

concentrated within themselves every virtue. It was probably a similar motive which induced Alimami Saddoo, the Foola king, to enquire of Mr. Watt and my brother the name of the mother of Moses*.

In Europe, at the present day, the superstitious practice of wearing amulets still prevails, and great faith is reposed in them, when hung round the necks of children, to protect them from disease. Anodyne necklaces are worn to prevent convulsions in teething, as a cure for worms, whooping cough, &c. and it is only lately that such modes of cure have been banished from our dispensaries, many instances of which may be seen in the writings of the excellent Mr. Boyle. It is not improbable that the necklace, which at present forms so ornamental a part of female dress, owed its origin to these superstitious practices. Dioscorides, speaking of the stone selenites, says, "*pro amuleto sibi eum alligant mulieres,*" and of the jasper he adds "*omnes pro amuletis alligari feruntur.*"

In all the Bullom and Timmanee towns gree-grees are placed to prevent the incursion of evil spirits or witches. These consist of pieces of rag, like streamers, attached to the end of a long pole; or a small country axe fixed upon the

* The king several times told them he had a very important question to put to them, which he must defer to a more private opportunity; at length obliging every one to go out except the interpreter, whom he said he was sorry to allow to be present, he asked, with great seriousness, what was the name of the mother of Moses.

trunk of a tree ; or the bottom of a bottle ; or an old pot placed upon the end of a stake : sometimes the greegree is a cannon ball, or an old pewter dish laid upon the ground ; but whatever it may consist of, it would give great offence to remove, or even to touch it.

When any person of consequence falls sick, he is immediately removed from his own residence to another town at some distance, to be farther from the effects of the witchcraft which is supposed to have been practised upon him. If he does not soon recover in his new situation, a hut is built in the deepest recess of some impenetrable wood, whither he is carried, the place of his retreat being only known to his most confidential friends. The late king Naimbanna in his last illness was removed from his own town, on the island of Robanna, to a small island a few miles distant. A semicircular piece of ground was cleared from the underwood, the larger trees being left standing ; and the only avenue to it was defended by the most potent greegrees which could be procured. A small hut, about eight or ten feet square and about six feet high, was formed of stakes driven into the ground, the sides and roof being composed of grass and flags neatly woven like a basket, but not so close as to prevent the access of light : in the midst was left standing the stem of a young tree, lopped about five feet from the ground, and upon the top of it was placed a greegree. The old king was laid upon mats spread on the ground,

surrounded by his own family : on one side stood the physician, who had in his hand a greegree of a very uncouth form, about four feet long, and ornamented with bells and pieces of iron, which he occasionally jingled with much self complacency, making a most distracting noise. A blister was applied to the patient, and some medicines, which I had taken with me, administered ; but notwithstanding these, and the greegrees used by his own physician, the king died soon after, much and deservedly lamented.

When any person of consequence dies, whether from the effects of old age, or illness produced by some other natural cause, the whole is commonly attributed to witchcraft, and the friends of the deceased make strict enquiry to discover the witch. This is frequently pointed out to some of them in a dream, which is considered as sufficient testimony. But what will appear strange, if we do not take into the account the dread of the red water ordeal, and the possibility of incantation having really been used with a view to injure the deceased, is, that the accused person frequently acknowledges the charge, and submits to his sentence without repining. During king Naimbanna's illness I saw an old man confined in chains, accused of having bewitched the king.

A person killed by witchcraft is supposed to die from the effects of a poison secretly administered or infused into his system by the witch ; or the latter is supposed to assume sometimes the form of some animal, as a cat, or a rat, which, during the

night, sucks the person's blood from a small and imperceptible wound, by which a lingering illness and death are produced ; and sometimes the form of a snake, which by its bite causes instant death. This piece of superstition appears to be alluded to in Ecclesiast. x. 11. where it is said, 'surely the serpent will bite without enchantment.'*

Greegrees are often placed in lugars or plantations to deter people from stealing, and a few old rags placed upon an orange tree† will generally, though not always, secure the fruit as effectually as if guarded by the dragons of the Hes-

* In the Encyclopedie Methodique is inserted a very curious and interesting detail of the superstitious practices of the vulgar in France, and of their firm adherence to the use of amulets and charms, which will probably apply with equal justness to many other parts of Europe. The following short extract is inserted here, because it affords so striking a picture of African superstition, that we might be almost tempted to believe it had been applied by mistake to the more *polished* natives of France. " Il suffit d'avoir parcouru les campagnes, à l'effet de porter des secours aux bestiaux malades, pour juger de l'espece de barbarie dans laquelle sont encore plongés le plus grand nombre des cultivateurs & des propriétaires des bestiaux. Une maladie opiniatre & qui devasté leurs écuries, leurs etables, ou leurs bergeries, est certainement, selon eux, l'effet d'un *sortilege*, & ceux dans l'esprit desquels la demonomanie est fortement enracinée, n'ont garde de soumettre les animaux malades au moindre traitement, parce qu'ils sont bien persuadés qu'il n'est aucune ressource de ce genre à opposer à la puissance invincible du diable. Les bergers sont specialement regardés comme *sorciers* dans la plupart des provinces, & sous ce titre ils ont droit à la confiance & à la crainte respectueuse du paysan." Medecine, tome II. p. 213. à l'article Amulette.

† Qualis frugifero quercus sublimis in agro
Exuvias veteres populi, sacrataque gestans
Dona ducum. Lucan. i. 136.

perides. When any person falls sick, if, at the distance of several months, he recollects having stolen fruit, &c. or having taken it *softly* as they term it, he immediately supposes *wangka* has caught him, and to get cured he must go or send to the person whose property he had taken, and make to him whatever recompence he demands.

This superstitious dread of witchcraft, which may be properly considered as a mental disease, like many of those diseases to which the body is subject, appears to have acquired additional vigour by being transplanted from one country to another. Accordingly we find that in the West India Islands the belief in witchcraft is the occasion of as much, if not more, terror to the negroes than in Africa whence it came at first. It is known in the West Indies by the name of *obia*, and its effects upon the minds of the slaves are so powerful as very frequently to prove fatal, notwithstanding the utmost efforts used to counteract them*.

* The following curious account of this strange malady is extracted from Mr. Bryan Edwards's History of the West India Islands. "The term *Obeah*, *Obiah* or *Obia* (for it is variously written) we conceive to be the adjective, and *Obe* or *Obi* the noun substantive; and that by the words, *obia* men or women, are meant those who practice *obi*." This, "is now become in Jamaica the general term to denote those Africans who in that island practise witchcraft or sorcery, comprehending also the class of what are called myalmen, or those who, by means of a narcotic potion, made with the juice of an herb (said to be the branched callalue, or species of *solanum*) which occasions a trance or profound sleep of a certain duration, endeavour to convince the deluded spectators of their power to reanimate dead bodies.

"As far as we are able to decide from our own experience and

Strange as these superstitious practices must appear to those who are not infatuated with

information when we lived in the island, and from the current testimony of all the negroes we have ever conversed with on the subject, the professors of *obi* are, and always were, natives of Africa, and none other; and they have brought the science with them from thence to Jamaica, where it is so universally practised, that we believe there are few of the large estates possessing native Africans, which have not one or more of them. The oldest and most crafty are those who usually attract the greatest devotion and confidence; those whose hoary heads, and a somewhat peculiarly harsh and forbidding in their aspect, together with some skill in plants of the medicinal and poisonous species, have qualified them for successful imposition upon the weak and credulous. The negroes in general, whether Africans or Creoles, revere, consult, and fear them; to these oracles they resort, and with the most implicit faith, upon all occasions, whether for the cure of disorders, the obtaining revenge for injuries or insults, the conciliating of favour, the discovery and punishment of the thief or the adulterer, and the prediction of future events. The trade which these impostors carry on is extremely lucrative; they manufacture and sell their *obies*, adapted to different cases and at different prices. A veil of mystery is studiously thrown over their incantations, to which the midnight hours are allotted, and every precaution is taken to conceal them from the knowledge and discovery of the white people. The deluded negroes, who thoroughly believe in their supernatural power, become the willing accomplices in this concealment, and the stoutest among them tremble at the very sight of the ragged bundle, the bottle, or the egg shells, which are stuck in the thatch or hung over the door of a hut, or upon the branch of a plantain tree, to deter marauders. In cases of poison, the natural effects of it are, by the ignorant negroes, ascribed entirely to the potent workings of *obi*. The wiser negroes hesitate to reveal their suspicions, through a dread of incurring the terrible vengeance which is fulminated by the *obeah* men against any one who should betray them; it is very difficult therefore for the white proprietor to distinguish the *obeah* professor from any other negro upon his plantation; and so infatuated are the blacks in general, that but few instances occur of their having assumed courage enough to impeach these miscreants. With minds so firmly prepossessed, they no sooner find

them, it is a well known fact, that many Europeans, who have resided for a length of time upon

the *obi set* for them near the door of their house, or in the path which leads to it, than they give themselves up for lost. When a negro is robbed of a fowl or a hog, he applies directly to the *obeah* man or woman ; it is then made known among his fellow blacks, that *obi is set* for the thief ; and as soon as the latter hears the dreadful news, his terrified imagination begins to work, no resource is left but in the superior skill of some more eminent *obeah men* of the neighbourhood, who may counteract the magical operations of the other ; but if no one can be found of higher rank and ability, or if, after gaining such an ally, he should still fancy himself affected, he presently falls into a decline, under the incessant horror of impending calamities. The slightest painful sensation in the head, the bowels, or any other part, any casual loss or hurt, confirms his apprehensions, and he believes himself the devoted victim of an invisible and irresistible agency. Sleep, appetite, and cheerfulness forsake him ; his strength decays, his disturbed imagination is haunted without respite, his features wear the settled gloom of despondency ; dirt or any other unwholesome substance become his only food ; he contracts a morbid habit of body, and gradually sinks into the grave. A negro, who is taken ill, enquires of the *obeah man* the cause of his sickness, whether it will prove mortal or not, and within what time he shall die or recover ? The oracle generally ascribes the distemper to the malice of some particular person by name, and advises to set *obi* for that person ; but if no hopes are given of recovery, immediate despair takes place, which no medicine can remove, and death is the certain consequence. Those anomalous symptoms, which originate from causes deeply rooted in the mind, such as the terrors of *obi*, or from poisons, whose operation is slow and intricate, will baffle the skill of the ablest physician.

"The *obi* is usually composed of a farrago of materials, most of which are enumerated in the Jamaica law (a law passed against this practice in 1760) viz. blood, feathers, parrots' beaks, dogs' teeth, alligators' teeth, broken bottles, grave dirt *, rum, and egg shells."

* *Grave dirt* affords a very solemn mode of trial among the negroes in the West Indies ; when accused of some crime of which they wish to prove their innocence, they take a little of the earth from the grave of a near relation or friend, and drink it mixed with water, wishing at the same time that it may cause their belly to swell, and prove fatal, if they be guilty of the imputed charge.

the coast of Africa, imbibe the same notions, practise them in their full extent, and become subject to all their terrors. I have been informed by an intimate friend, a man of strict veracity, who resided several years in Jamaica, that a member of the council in that island was so strongly convinced of the reality of these absurd practices, as to shew evident marks of fear and perturbation, when, during the trial of an obia man, some of the articles of *obi* abovementioned, which had been found upon the person accused of this practice, were laid near him upon a table.

The dread of poison affords to the African another cause for alarm, though in general it is connected with some superstitious terrors, and magical illusions. To remove every apprehension of this kind from the minds of their guests, it is customary for the host to taste the meat and drink before it be offered to them, and on returning their visit, he expects a similar mark of assurance. Their great skill in selecting the most deleterious poisons has frequently been noticed by writers, but this is perhaps only in common with all rude nations, who have had more credit given to them for their knowledge in this particular than they really merit. A sensible writer observes, that " the American Indians are noted for their traditional knowledge of poisonous herbs and antidotes, but I do not find, he adds, that our Indian venefici are so expert in the veneficium art, as the negroes of Africa, who give poisons, which in various but certain periods produce their mortal

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effects, some suddenly, some after a number of months or years." There appears, however, to be a great degree of credulity in this account; for from all that I could learn upon this subject, I am convinced that the Africans are not acquainted with any poisons, but such as prove fatal by their violent action upon the stomach and bowels. The gall of the alligator* is considered by the natives of Sierra Leone as one of the most active and fatal poisons, but it is chiefly used in combination with magical ceremonies and in the composition of greegrees. In Egypt, on the contrary, the gall of the crocodile is extolled as an invaluable and safe internal medicine. Dr. Hasselquist says, six grains of it, probably dried, are given as a certain remedy for barrenness; and outwardly they apply a pessus made of cotton and the gall of the crocodile†. If any person in the neighbourhood of Sierra Leone should happen to kill an alligator, he must have the testimony of at least two respectable witnesses to prove that he poured the gall upon the ground, and in case of failure he is liable to be severely punished. In some parts of that country, however, it is made use of as an external application in lumbago, and is rubbed on the part after it has been scarified. The Egyptians applied the gall of the crocodile in complaints of the eyes, and used its fat as

* The Romans had the same opinion of the gall of a horse: Pliny says, "*dammatur equinum (fel) tantum in ter vergena.*" l. 28. c. 40.

† Travels in the Levant.

an application in rheumatic disorders. It is said by Roemer* that the natives about Akra, on the Gold Coast, use the gall of the alligator as a poison; and he adds, when they kill a sea cow, manatee, with young, they preserve the fæces of the calf, which they look upon as a still more violent poison. These pretended poisons appear rather designed to excite a sense of nausea and disgust, than any serious apprehension of danger, and the antidotes said to prove effectual against other poisons equally violent, lead us to entertain some degree of scepticism with respect to their powers. The Ticunas, a race of Indians inhabiting the banks of the river of the Amazons, are said to possess the most subtle poison yet known. It is extracted wholly from vegetables, chiefly from certain species of vines, (lianes), and with this they poison their arrows. Monsieur de la Condamine says, that thirty species of herbs and roots enter into its composition; it proves speedily fatal to men and animals, but its fatal effects are said to be prevented by *salt*, and still more certainly by *sugar*. "With the poison of serpents and the juice of the sideroxylum toxiferum (gift boom, or poison tree) according to Professor Thunberg the Hottentots poison their arrows†,

* Nachrichten von die Kuste Guinea.

† The use of poisoned weapons is of great antiquity, and probably originated among those rude nations who found themselves unable, without such assistance, to resist the attacks of the wild beasts which surrounded them. In proportion as these people became more civilized, they laid aside such pusillanimous practices, and had recourse to more manly methods of defence. Ho-

which they use against antelopes and wild buffaloes, as also against their enemies ;” he further adds, that “ the *blood of a tortoise*, used externally and internally, is of the greatest service in wounds from these poisoned arrows, and that it is dried, and always carried by the Hottentots in their journeys*.

mer takes notice of this usage, but mentions it in such a manner as seems to shew that it was not generally approved ; indeed he represents in the following lines a person as refusing, from religious motives, to propagate this pernicious art.

For thither¹ also had Ulysses gone
In his swift bark, seeking some pois'nous drug
Wherewith to taint his brazen arrows keen,
Which drug, through fear of the eternal gods
Ilus refused him, and my father free
Gave to him, for he loved him past belief.

COWPER'S HOMER, ODYSSEY I.

* The juice of the bitter cassada, *jatropha manihot*, is perhaps one of the most deleterious poisons of the vegetable creation ; it very speedily produces its fatal effects upon the larger animals, although we obtain a very wholesome and nutritious substance, called tapioca, from the sediment which its juice deposits. An ingenious writer observes, that he has “ known a strong negro die in little more than an hour after drinking perhaps half a pint or more of this juice, and a strong mule in much less time. Negroes, who had eaten the roots roasted, lived three or four hours after.” This juice, when recently expressed, is as white as milk of almonds and has somewhat of its smell. The following instance of its fatal effects, if any dependance can be placed upon it, may serve as a proper supplement to Captain Stedman's account of the *humane* treatment of the slaves in Surinam. “ Un de mes amis dit le meme medecin (de Surinam) me confia qu'il voulait punir de mort un de ses esclaves *tres coupable*. Comme j'etais curieux de connaitre toujours mieux l'effet de ce poison, je me determinai a l'employer pour le defaire de ce malheureux negre, avec promesse d'une fidelite inviolable à garder le secret, d'assister moi meme a l'*execution*, & faire ensuite l'ouverture du cadavre. Je

¹ To Ephyre.

According to a vulgar prejudice entertained by the lower classes in England, the blacks are said to have naturally a very deleterious poison growing under their nails, with which they frequently destroy those who offend them. This opinion may perhaps have originated from the method practised by a tribe of Indians in Guiana, who sometimes conceal under their nail part of the kernel of a nut, produced by a tree called caruna, which they secretly mix in the drink of any one whom they have an antipathy to, and which proves slowly but certainly fatal*. Captain Stedman adds, in addition to this account of the caruna, that "by only dipping their thumb into a tumbler of water, which they offer as a beverage to the object of their revenge, they infuse a slow but certain death."

No instance occurred, to my knowledge, of any of the natives near Sierra Leone dying from the

lui donnai trente cinq gouttes de cette liqueur : & à peine les eut il avalées, que ce miserable fit des contorsions & des hurlemens horribles. Ils furent suivis d'évacuations, de mouvemens convulsifs, & en six minutes ce malheureux eut perdu la vie. Trois heures après, j'en fis l'ouverture, & ne trouvai aucunes des parties offensées, aucune inflammation, excepté l'estomac, qui s'était retiré de plus de moitié.

En distillant, à feu gradué, cinquante livres de suc recent de manioc, la vertu du poison ne passe que dans les trois ou quatre premieres onces de l'esprit qu'on en retire. L'odeur en est insupportable ; & c'est de cet elixir terrible que se sert le medecin de Surinam. L'huile chaude de navette est un excellent antidote, ainsi que le suc de roucou ; mais il faut les prendre sur le champ, car ils ne produiraient aucun effet si on diffèrait de les employer. Voyage à la Guiane p. 100.

* Bancroft's History of Guiana.

effects of poison, one woman excepted, who was killed by drinking the red water in public, several instances of which have been related to me. They do not however consider this as a poison, because they do not think it would be fatal if the person who drinks it were innocent. The only poison with which they are acquainted, and which they generally acknowledge as such, is taken from a large tree called by the Bulloms and Timmanees toma. They assert, that if the juice of two or three of the leaves be swallowed, it proves fatal in a very short time. It is customary, when they discover that the calabashes fixed to the palm trees to collect the wine are robbed of the liquor, which is often done by a species of ape, to infuse in them a few leaves of the toma, by which means the unsuspecting thief is punished with immediate death. After this poison has been swallowed, the tongue turns black, and the body swells very much.

There is another strange practice, of which the Europeans accuse the Africans, which, however, as there can be no real foundation for it, is wrapped up in much mystery and obscurity. They are said to cause the body of any person to swell to a prodigious size by merely *blowing* upon them; this is sometimes done by contact, and in so secret a manner as not to be observed by the injured party; at other times it is done by blowing a certain substance through a long tube at people as they cross a distant path. There may indeed be some foundation for the latter practice, as it is said to be frequently used by the natives of Gui-

ana, who blow, through a tube about six feet long, a kind of dart*, about ten or twelve inches long, made of a splinter of a species of palm tree, and dipped in a poison called woorara. These destructive weapons, it is affirmed, are thrown by the breath to the distance of forty paces with unerring skill. Captain Stedman mentions an instance of a negro woman, who, though slightly wounded by one of these arrows, almost instantly expired, and her sucking infant, though unhurt by the arrow, lost its life also by drinking her milk. In this instance, supposing the poison possesses the active powers ascribed to it, no doubt can be entertained of the efficacy of the practice, but in the former instance there is every reason to suppose that the imagination alone is acted upon. Having made many enquiries upon the subject, I am convinced that the story of *blowing* is founded only on idle report, and deserves to be classed among the *fabulæ aniles*, those remnants of superstition and ignorance so abundant in every country, and which, by being frequently repeated among the lower classes of Europeans, has gained established credit. The answers of the natives also are rather calculated to support the illusion, as they are only anxious to clear their own characters from this aspersion, by professing their utter ignorance of it, though they are indifferent respecting those to whom it may attach, and even in some instances are ready to accuse

* Voyage a la Guiana & a Cayenne, fait en 1789.

their neighbours ; thus I have heard some Bullom people accuse the inhabitants of the river Sherbro of practising this art, and these in their turn may probably retort. It may appear perhaps unnecessary to have mentioned this circumstance, but as it has been noticed by an author of great respectability and eminence in his profession, as having occurred to a patient under his care at Antigua, it was entitled to some consideration.