

THE AMATEUR DOCTORS.

Brrr, Brrr! Brrr, Brrr! shrilled the telephone, though the time was only 6.45 a.m. There were few such instruments on Ocean Island in the mid-thirties, one being in the office of the Secretary to Government, which post I then filled. It quickly passed through my mind that the call could hardly be from the Government radio station, since its schedules did not normally commence until about 8 a.m. Nor did I think that the call could emanate from the Superintendent of Police since crime was then at a very low ebb and labour relations within the operations of the British Phosphate Commission were excellent. The other telephone was in the office of the Resident Commissioner, a post then filled in an acting capacity by the Treasurer (who was also Chief Postmaster and Collector of Customs). But I felt confident that he was highly unlikely to be telephoning at that hour, if indeed he was out of bed, or even awake.

But I was wrong.

First, however, perhaps I should explain just why I was in my office at that very early hour. Ocean Island, being virtually on the Equator, sunrise was usually anywhere between, say, 5.20 and 5.50 a.m. throughout the year. It was far and away the most delightful part of the day - a delicious degree of coolness, coupled with glorious sunrises for almost all the year. To remain in bed and miss that part of the day always seemed to me to be unforgiveable. Further, it was a time of the day before the steadily rising temperatures took over - a time which was therefore conducive to consider problems in peace and quiet before staff arrived, telephones rang, and problems suddenly arrived on one's desk. So I used to attend the office from about 5.45 to 7.45 a.m. before returning to my nearby house for breakfast.

On the particular morning in question, however, I was feeling somewhat jaded after a late night. So, when the telephone rang at 6.45 a.m. I did not feel inclined to be particularly polite or helpful, but nevertheless reluctantly picked up the instrument, only to be greeted by the stuttering tones of the Acting Resident Commissioner - thus:-

"Hello, hello, g - g o o d m - m o r n i n g , my b-b- oy. G-glad to k-k-know that you are at w-w-ork so early. W-w-on't b-b-other you w-w-ith details now, b-b-ut I w-w-ant you and the S-superintendent of P-p-olice up here in my office at n-n-nine a.m. s-s-harp. That's all. G'bye".

The call certainly puzzled me. I pushed the pile of files on which I had been working away from me and tried to imagine just what could be the reason for this very early morning call and the urgency for a meeting. After half-an-hour I telephoned the Superintendent of Police and told him that our presence was required at the Residency at 9 a.m. sharp though, in response to his enquiry, I added that I had not been told, and could not surmise, the reason for this somewhat unusual and pressing order.

After breakfast, I returned to the office and, at five minutes to nine o'clock, walked over to the Residency. Entering the office, I was given the usual warm greeting by its occupant who said that we would not proceed to official business until Jack (the policeman) arrived, which he did a few minutes later.

The Acting Resident Commissioner came straight to the point. A severe outbreak of a particularly virulent form of influenza had been brought to Ocean Island by one of the ships of the British Phosphate Commission from Australia - from Melbourne if I remember aright - towards the latter part of the month of July, 1935, only two weeks previously. The natives, who had little or no resistance, went down like ninepins as did many Europeans too (including the Medical Officer of the Commission, the only doctor on the island, and all Government officers save for we three and the senior radio operator who remained at work).

After discussing the rapidly spreading epidemic at some length, the Acting Resident Commissioner asked Jack and me whether we had any suggestions to offer, but such a question was much easier to ask than to answer. In those days there were no aviation services in or between the Pacific islands - the first trans-Pacific service was only put through by Pan American Airways in 1938 - and ships from Australia or New Zealand usually took between ten and fourteen days to reach Ocean Island. There was therefore virtually no prospect of securing the services of additional medical staff or supplies; in any case the virus was unidentifiable. Further, the strictest quarantine had been established around the island, thus discouraging all shipping communications. Neither Jack nor I was therefore able to make any helpful suggestions. Nevertheless, it was impossible to view the situation with any degree of complacency since a number of deaths had already occurred amongst the native population and it seemed only too likely that there would be an increasing number of fatalities.

At the close of these somewhat desultory and despairing discussions, the Acting Resident Commissioner tapped his desk sharply with a pencil and proposed two lines of action which he thought we should follow. First, Jack and I should visit the Medical Officer who, even though he was laid low with influenza, had agreed to see us and explain how we might be able to render some assistance to those stricken in the epidemic. We should go down to the Commission's settlement that afternoon and thereafter take such action as the Medical Officer suggested each early and late afternoon, and evening. We should carry out our normal duties in the afternoons; there would in any case be few mails arriving in the island, which would ease my lot, whilst crime and labour troubles seemed unlikely to cause problems in the circumstances.

In reply to our natural enquiries as to how we should occupy our time in the mornings, and what would happen if Jack and I, or one of us succumbed to the influenza, he said that this would be taken care of by the second course of action which he had in mind. In his view, whatever might happen, the Government, in the persons of the three of us, could not possibly be allowed to suspend operations. He therefore proposed to take steps to ensure that that did not happen. Fortunately he had what he believed to be a potent and infallible remedy to defeat the particular virus, though insufficient to disseminate it generally. The remedy might adversely affect us briefly after taking it which was why he had not suggested any particular duties for us each morning.

He then pressed the bell button on the underside of his desk, the ringing of which we could hear on the back verandah, whereupon one of the servants entered bearing a silver tray on which were an unopened bottle of whisky, a carafe of water, an ice bucket full of blocks and three glasses. I must confess that my heart sank at the thought of consuming a whisky or two at that time of the morning, even in a defiant gesture to the influenza virus. However, our host bade us help ourselves and we did so.

He then announced that the three of us would meet in his office each morning at 9 a.m. ; that Jack and I should report on the epidemic and our activities; that an unopened bottle of whisky would be provided each morning and that neither of us would be allowed to leave the office until the last drop had been drained from the bottle. In this manner, all influenza germs would be killed off and the three of us would survive the epidemic, even though after taking our 'medecine' at 9 a.m. each morning, we might find it difficult to concentrate on our duties during what was left of the morning.

Jack and I were appalled and quite speechless. At that moment, a riot of thoughts ran through my head. Being a young and fairly newly-joined Cadet, though now occupying a senior post, I felt that, however much I might disagree with the cure proposed, it would be unwise to

refuse to participate. After four years at Cambridge University, I felt that there was a sporting chance that I might survive the draconian treatment, especially as I was confident that our host, the blood in whose veins was I believed largely whisky, would consume half the contents of the bottle himself (as indeed usually turned out to be the case). But I felt very sorry for Jack, who was an Australian and essentially a beer-drinker. It also struck me that it was going to prove a pretty costly treatment for there was at that point in time no sign of the ending of the epidemic; on the other hand, I knew that our host could well afford the cost since, apart from his private means, in his acting capacity he obtained all his liquor - cheap in those days anyway - duty free. Jack, who was a good deal older than me, did utter a half-hearted protest, but was quickly overpersuaded or, more correctly, overruled.

The ensuing conversation, somewhat desultory at first, quickened as the level in the bottle fell. At one point a servant entered with a tray on which lay a telegram, which he announced a messenger had just brought from the radio station. Being addressed to him, our host opened it and on reading it uttered some rude words, before handing it over to me. It was from the principal Government Auditor in Suva demanding to know why we had overspent the vote for prisoners' rations in the preceding year by £5. 15s. 5d. To have sent us a telegram making such an enquiry during the epidemic, of which the sender was aware, struck the three of us as a bad joke, and this splendid example of bureaucracy at its most irritating was greeted with a loud Bronx cheer.

That first day's bottle lasted until about 11 a.m. when Jack and I staggered out of the office. Our host, perhaps more wisely, remained seated though, even if he had accompanied us, I doubt if he would have reeled quite as much as we did.

Still feeling somewhat shaky, Jack and I met, as arranged, at 4 p.m. and walked down to the Commission's settlement, finishing up at the house of the Medical Officer. He was not feeling at all well, though from causes very different to ours. He handed each of us a couple of thermometers and a largeish bottle of tablets - I forget their name now - which he said should help to reduce the high temperatures being experienced by the victims of this influenza. He explained that we should first take the temperatures of the victims and then hand out from one to three tablets - but never more than three - depending on the temperature and age of the sufferer; a child should never be given more than one tablet. Thus began our careers as honorary M.Ds.

all

During the epidemic virtually/ of the native labour force and their families, numbering some 1200 in all, were affected, as were also some 80% of the Banaban population of 750 folk; of the Police Force and their families, some 95% were affected, as were almost all the prisoners in the gaols. About one third of the European population, and some 10% of the Chinese (recruited from Hong Kong) were also stricken; they had of course a much greater resistance to diseases than the natives, and were correspondingly less affected than the natives. For a few days, there were not even enough persons available to bury the dead.

Unfortunately pneumonia supervened in a number of cases and this was responsible for a number of fatalities. Forty-four natives died as a result of the epidemic. Mercifully, however, not a single native to whom we gave our tablets succumbed, with but one exception; this was a Gilbertese man who, with a temperature of 104° , decided after our departure that he was uncomfortably hot and feverish, and took a cold shower to cool himself down; not surprisingly pneumonia supervened with fatal results.

The island was not declared 'clean' until mid-September so that for some four weeks Jack and I pursued our unorthodox new life, visiting the police and labour lines, or the Banaban villages first thing in the morning, receiving our own 'medecine' from 9 a.m. daily, recovering during the rest of the morning, struggling to work in the afternoons, (though mercifully my office duties were light), and making another round of the lines and villages in the evenings. During those weeks Jack and I dutifully marched up to the Residency each morning, Sundays included, to take our 'medecine'. Of those sessions I do not remember a great deal. I do, however, recall that our host's desk was usually covered with draft personal testimonials and odes extolling the powers of Johnnie Walker in repelling the virus. Maybe he hoped to make his fortune out of the distiller by such means, but I never discovered what happened to them.

Mirabile dictu, I can only say that none of the three of us ever succumbed to the influenza, but whether the mode and circumstances of our 'cure' was sensible was quite another matter. I can only reluctantly admit that it apparently worked, though whether the 'medecine' and its effects were directly related I would find it impossible to prove. But our host was in no doubt whatever. It was certainly not the last time that I found that unorthodox remedies came to my rescue in those distant islands where medical care was scarce or, more usually, non-existent.

After the end of the epidemic, I received a glowing letter of commendation from our host, filled with all those horrible clichés that one came across in the course of one's service; thus, I had "kept the flag flying throughout the epidemic"; I had "held the fort" practically single-handed; I had "taken my 'medecine' like a man" - all this representing "action in the highest and best traditions of Her Majesty's Colonial Administrative Service" - though I had never imagined that disposing of about a third of a bottle of whisky between about 9 a.m. and 10 a.m. daily for about four weeks on end could be thus described. Although I still possess the letter, no copy was unfortunately sent to the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific in Suva, so that no official record exists, since copies were destroyed at the time of the Japanese invasion of Ocean Island in 1942. But I often wonder what higher authority would have made of the letter, especially since another phrase in it referred to "the power of the spirit" (spelt with a small 's'), from which, together with the letter's signatory, they might just possibly have surmised the truth and accordingly felt that I was worthy of some commendation, if not a medal, then at least some parchment congratulating me on my sheer intestinal fortitude.

But to digress momentarily: if my memories of the epidemic itself are somewhat vague, I clearly recall one or two incidents at the party which my host gave to celebrate the ending of the epidemic. The party was held at the Residency and I was asked by my host to introduce and supervise entertainments after supper. By the time that supper and its preliminaries were over and all folk were in an exhilaratingly festive mood, entertainments were commenced. After the usual games of poker and roulette were concluded, I suggested that the party should try 'bobbing for apples', which all, in their festive mood, decided would present no problems. The secrets of the game are not to fill the bath more than necessary - with not more than some 4 inches of water - so that the competitors cannot wedge the apple against the bottom of the bath, especially if he or she is bent double over the bath, and to have an apple that is neither too soft and therefore easily seized by the teeth, or too hard so that it is difficult if not impossible to get a firm grip on it. Competitor after competitor however failed to get a grip on the apple, until only one was left - an earnest and somewhat retiring young man from the Treasury. He struggled manfully until it

appeared that he might just have achieved success, when someone stuck a pin into his bottom, whereat he straightened up with a yell of pain. But what should all the surrounding crowd behold but a bright green Grannie Smith apple floating in the bath with a complete set of snow-white dentures firmly gripping it - a superb spectacle that had to be seen to be believed.

After the pandemonium had died down, I then introduced a game of my own invention. This required a circular table of about four feet in diameter. On this was placed a circle of paper about three feet in diameter, and in the centre of the latter circle was a smaller one of about $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter - in fact the diameter of a round tin of 50 cigarettes. The space between the inner and outer circles was divided up into segments of different sizes and the odds on each segment varied according to the size of the segment. Meanwhile, during the preceding evening and the morning of the party, I and my Gilbertese servant had collected as many insects, etc., as we could find, each one being put in a separate cigarette tin, with holes drilled in the top to keep them alive. There were ants, moths, copra bugs, geckoes (small pale house lizards about three inches long, which could jump fairly smartly but not for any distance), cockroaches, even flies (which had been given a drop of brandy), and some small black lizards with irridescant markings, about $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, which lived among the coral rocks and which could run and leap like a shot out of a gun. Each tin was numbered and I alone held a list of the runners in each tin. The game was played thus: a tin was placed upside down in the small centre circle; everyone was then called on to place their bets as to which segment of the outer circle the runner would run off; thereafter the tin was lifted and the runner took off; if a runner failed to reach the outer circumference after five minutes, the winning segment was the one which the runner then occupied; in the case of moths, which might fly off, the winning segment was that over which they flew off the paper.

Everyone crowded round the table to watch this somewhat novel game, the ladies all being seated in front, with the men standing behind their chairs. All leant forward enthusiastically to place their bets and follow the runners, of which they knew nothing until the small tin in the centre was lifted.

The first runner turned out to be an ant which, after wandering around the paper for some four minutes, finally ran off the 6 - 1 segment; bets were paid off much to the delight of those who had won. The next runner was a cockroach, which, after a momentary hesitation since he was no longer incarcerated, took off over the 2 - 1 segment at high speed. The the third runner was a gecko, somewhat mazed by the sudden bright light, but, after a cautious perambulation around the paper, leapt off the table into a lady's lap and thence to the floor; unfortunately for those who had placed bets, the gecko left via the bank's segment, and the bank collected all the bets. The next runner was a moth, also somewhat dazzled by its new found freedom; at first it seemed as though it would not leave the inner circle within the five-minute period allowed, but when the period had almost elapsed it suddenly took off almost vertically like a VTOL aircraft and flew the length of the verandah on which the game was being played. There was at first some dispute as to what segment it had flown over on its departure, but eventually the matter was noisily though amicably settled.

As the game progressed and the fun became fast and furious - there were no limits on bets - those seated round the table bent over it further and further owing to the general excitement, whilst those behind pressed forward in their turn. One of the ladies, a very portly dame whom I do remember, was leaning well over the table almost impinging on the tracks; she was wearing a very low cut evening frock, totally unsuitable alas as she had a vast bosom unconstrained by a brassiere!

The next runner was one of the black lizards. As with the other runners, he (or she) seemed at first dazzled by the sudden light. But - whoosh - it suddenly took off like a Titan rocket, leaping into the air and diving unerringly into the inviting bosom of the plump lady crouched forward over the table! Pendemonium ensued and it was hard to say whether the lady's screams or the gales of laughter from others round the table preponderated. Short of disrobing, however, there seemed little likelihood of luring the friendly but probably petrified little black lizard from his hiding place. However, after a minute or two, his head cautiously emerged between what were popularly known as "Scylla" and "Charybdis" and one could only presume that he had decided that, rather than be suffocated between them, he was probably better off with some fresh air; for he suddenly shot back on to the table and with another prodigious leap between two ladies landed on the floor and vanished at high speed down the verandah. By then the lady in whose bosom he had stowed away had been given a large beaker of brandy and eventually ceased to scream. But she never took part in the game again, and I don't think she ever forgave me as the inventor of the game.

But to resume the recording of local cures. My next experience was brief, though the circumstances were extremely painful. It came about in this wise and occurred on Ocean Island. I had spent a busier day than usual in the office since it was 'mail day', which usually occurred about every two or three weeks. But, on this occasion there had been an unusually large incoming mail, and a larger mail to despatch than usual. It was not therefore until about 6.30 p.m. that I managed to leave the office and return to my quarters. My servant told me that he had been shopping for me that day and had a good supper awaiting me. So, after a couple of drinks, I sat down to supper. It turned out to be a deliciously grilled fish, somewhat like a plaice, together with vegetables, followed by a coconut souffle and cream. Being somewhat fatigued, I retired to bed about 9.30 p.m. and was soon sound asleep.

I awoke, however, about 11.30 p.m. with pains in my stomach. A visit to the bathroom eased the pains, but it was not long before they recommenced with greatly increased intensity. To cut a long story short, they finally got so bad that I felt that I must get some help. Unfortunately, however, my servant had gone home and my quarters contained no telephone. So there was nothing for it but for me to try and reach the nearest quarters, which were occupied by the Superintendent of Police, an Australian named Jack. Even they were some 500 yards distant. That may seem no great distance but at that point in time I was really doubled up in agony and could not even stand up, much less walk. So I had to make the journey on hands and knees. It seemed never-ending. Fortunately, about half of the distance was over the coarse turf of the cricket cum football field, but the remainder was on paths of crushed or chipped coral, so that I arrived at Jack's quarters with my knees seriously cut up.

I managed to throw a stone through Jack's bedroom window, at which his startled face appeared, for he was unaccustomed to such a means of rousing him and, as he told me later, feared there had been an outbreak of trouble somewhere on the island. I besought him to come round at once to the front door, which he speedily did. As I was lying on his front steps, his initial thought may well have been that perhaps I had been to a party and indulged myself a bit too generously during the evening. However, in halting speech I quickly managed to persuade him that I was in very considerable pain - almost certainly due to the fish I had eaten and which must have poisoned me, for nothing else I had eaten or drunk that day could possibly have done so.

He dragged me into the lounge and managed to haul me on to a chaise longue. Then, with a cheerful cry, which sounded convincing but which I greatly doubted, of "I'll soon fix you up if it's just a little

fish poisoning" , he disappeared into the back rooms of the quarters. Meanwhile, I was in very considerable pain indeed on the chaise longue. However, Jack was soon back, clutching a large glass filled to the brim with what appeared to be two separate liquids, which seemed not to have coalesced. The top one was colourless, whilst the bottom half was of a brownish colour.

"Drink this without stopping or taking breath" said Jack. "Sipping it will do you no good at all".

So I did as I was bid. Consuming the top contents of the glass took quite an effort, but I was determined by hook or by crook to rid myself of my severe stomach pains. The liquid in the bottom half of the glass was, however, easier to imbibe, though the whole exercise was somewhat exhausting. With Jack's help I then managed to struggle to the bathroom, before returning to the chaise longue. I do not know how long I remained awake though Jack told me the next morning that it was only a very brief time before I was asleep.

The next thing I remember was Jack tapping me on the shoulder. It was about 6 a.m. the following morning. The pains had gone. After visiting the bathroom, I returned to the lounge and said to Jack - "Well, I don't know what the hell you gave me to drink last night, but the pains have gone. And, just in case I ever suffer from fish poisoning again, please tell me just what was in that glass you gave me to drink last night".

" Oh", he said with a laugh "the top half of the contents was merely castor oil, and the bottom half was Australian hospital brandy; but they just won't mix".

Although I have never since suffered from such severe fish poisoning, I can very confidently recommend Jack's remedy which, though drastic, was extraordinarily efficacious.

One of the most unpleasant problems facing an officer in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands before the war was the matter of dental treatment, especially when it is appreciated that tours of service were for a period of three years. For there was not a single dentist in the whole Colony, and indeed only two qualified Medical Officers when I first went there. One was stationed in Ocean Island and the other 250 miles away in Tarawa, but neither possessed any dental qualification. There were also a limited number of Native Medical Practitioners, who had undertaken a six-year course at the Medical School in Fiji, but had little or no knowledge of dentistry. The Medical Officers were, of course, entirely capable of performing dental extractions, but their native counterparts much less so.

I recall that one day, fortunately nearing the end of my first tour, I had spent several rather wretched hours suffering from twinges of toothache, and was at a loss to know, or decide, what, if anything, to do about it. But feeling the need of companionship and sympathy, at least to take my mind off it, I wended my way that evening to the quarters of the Chief Postmaster - an old friend, and one who had produced a surprisingly efficacious cure in the virulent influenza epidemic some months earlier.

He welcomed me and it was not long before he remarked that I seemed rather downcast and less cheerful than was my usual wont. So I explained about the toothache and bemoaned the fact that there were no dentists in the Colony. Whereupon he laughingly explained that, even as I had shown trust - if that was the right word - in his medical treatment in the influenza epidemic, I should now trust him to cure my toothache. Whilst I suspected that any cure of his would involve the intake of alcohol in some form or other, I decided to take a chance on his confident assertion that he could cure me.

In stentorian, but stuttering tones - for he stammered badly, though I shall not attempt to reproduce it here - he summoned his servant, a burly Gilbertese man, whose name was Tumaka, but whom he called "Shoemaker". He came from the island of Tamana in the Southern Gilberts, where his German forebear by the name of Henry Schumacher had been a trader for the German firm of J.C. Godeffroy & Co. in Samoa since the early seventies. He told Tumaka to bring a glass and a bottle of brandy for me, and whisky, water, iceblocks and a glass for himself.

Explaining that the cure for toothache was to be taken in two stages, he poured three fingers of brandy into my glass. Though I remonstrated about the size of the first 'dose', it was in vain; nor would he accede to my request for some iceblocks, arguing that they would merely serve to dilute the 'medecine' and prolong the time taken to effect the cure. He then explained that, to be fully effective, the first drink had to be taken at high speed and not sipped over a period of time. I could not quite see the force of this argument for the brandy would vanish down my throat, if taken as directed, barely moistening the afflicted tooth. However, the argument was in vain and, frankly, admitting silently to myself that his cure had apparently worked in the influenza epidemic, I downed the 'medecine' at the speed directed.

Not that it was vintage or four star brandy; indeed, I noted from the label on the bottle that it was "Australian hospital brandy" which sounded a more hopeful title if a cure was to be effected.

Whilst I was recovering from the torrential rush of the "three fingers" down my throat, my host explained that the second stage involved the consumption of a mere "two fingers". But this had to be imbibed rather differently. It was all to be taken into my mouth in one gulp, but there swilled round and round for at least ten or fifteen minutes to ensure that the aching tooth was well bathed in the brandy. Only after that period of time should the brandy be swallowed.

At the conclusion of the second stage, I must confess that my thoughts were no longer centred on the unpleasantness of toothache, but worries as to whether I should be able to make it back to my quarters later without mishap. Being thus somewhat bemused, I did not at first notice that a further "three fingers" had been poured into my glass, nor heed the beguiling voice that no toothache was ever cured by passing through the first two stages of the cure. So, rather than argue with my host, I disposed at high speed of the second dose of "three fingers", and might well have fallen asleep save that he warned me that a second dose for holding and circulating in my mouth was awaiting me. Feebly asserting that, as far as I was concerned, this was definitely the final stage of the cure - to which my host somewhat surprisingly agreed - I downed the second dose of "two fingers".

At this stage I suddenly recalled that the main purpose of my visit had been to enjoy the companionship, and sympathy, of my host, rather than the forlorn hope of obtaining a cure for my toothache. There was no doubt that my host had been enjoying my visit for he laughed frequently throughout, but I doubted if I should feel able to claim the same. But I suddenly realized that the toothache had subsided, unless my senses were so numbed by the quantity of brandy which I had drunk at such high speed that I was in no position to make an accurate judgment. But the longer I considered it, the clearer it became that once more it appeared that one of my host's claimed cures had actually worked. Whether there was something very special about "Australian hospital brandy" (which I doubted whether it merited more than one star), as compared to normally good French brandy, I don't know. At any rate, it cured my toothache, even if my senses reeled somewhat at the treatment. So much for another local remedy.

My next two experiences of local remedies, or rather medical attention, took place in the island of Funafuti, the headquarters of the Ellice Islands, now known as Tuvalu, whither I had been posted as District Officer. Funafuti was pretty isolated, being some 750 miles south of Tarawa, the headquarters of the Gilbert Islands, and some 900 miles from Colony headquarters in Ocean Island. I was the sole European in the nine Ellice Islands during the $6\frac{1}{2}$ months which I spent there.

Nearly 50 years later I happened to be enjoying supper at the house of a friend of mine in Fiji, and talking to my hostess, when she suddenly said "Oh, I do so want you to meet the new Governor-General of the Ellice Islands, for I am sure you will have much to reminisce about". I spun round on my heel and looked into a face which I instantly recognized despite the passing of almost 50 years, for it was that of one Penitala (more familiarly known as Peni) who used to be my Clerk and Interpreter when I was in the Ellice Islands. Despite his elevation to high office, he at once thrust out his hand and said "How happy I am to meet you again, Sir" using the latter word from force of habit I supposed. Fortunately in the brief pause I managed to collect my wits and said "I too am no less delighted, Your Excellency", at which he laughed uproariously. For he was then Sir Fiatau Penitala Teo, G.C.M.G., I.S.O., M.B.E. and it would have been hard to conceive a more complete reversal of our relative ranks and status. But I introduce him as he figures prominently in this story.

Visits by shipping to Funafuti, or indeed the Ellice Islands, were then extremely rare and very irregular indeed. In the $6\frac{1}{2}$ months I spent in those islands only one ship visited there. It was one of the oddest looking vessels I had ever seen being a sailing ship which had been converted into a steamer, registered in Panama, and named the "Beulah".

Having first disposed of the mails which I had brought with me to Funafuti, and those which arrived on the "Beulah", and being confined to Funafuti, I welcomed a suggestion made one morning by Peni that we should go spear-fishing on the reefs to the eastward of the northern passage into the lagoon. For this purpose, he produced several fish-spears - made of bamboo, about 6 feet long, with three or four spikes or quills from the tail of a sting ray firmly bound to one end. The 'teeth' on the spikes were barbed like fish hooks and set backwards like a harpoon so that it was impossible to withdraw the spike out of the flesh. To be 'hit' by such a sting ray was normally fatal unless medical attention was almost immediately available.

Choosing the appropriate tide, we set off in a canoe with two sturdy paddlers, assisted by Peni. The Ellice Islands' canoe is little more than a hollowed-out tree trunk and clumsy compared to the lovely clinker-built canoes of the Gilbert Islands; though primitive sails are used, the main method of propulsion is paddling. We finally disembarked at a beach and set out along the reef. I felt reasonably confident that spearing the fish would not present too great a problem, but how wrong I was! We were first to have some fun spearing small sand sharks about three feet in length which basked on the reef in shallow water at low tide, or in the large pools left by the tide. Seemingly easy enough to spear, it was some time before I managed to impale one.

After spearing some of the sand sharks, we then turned our attention to spearing other fish. I had no luck for some time until I finally speared a beautiful small fish, in shape and size like a plaice, but jet black all over in colour, save for two perfect crimson circles about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter on each side. Fortunately, I recalled that many tropical fish often had hurtful or poisonous spikes along

along their backs, either on the surface or let into the dorsal bones. So, smoothing the fingers of my right hand over its back (where there did in fact turn out to be such a spike, which I firmly pressed down), I then placed my right thumb along its ventral fin. No sooner had I done so, however, than I felt a sharp jab in the ball of my thumb, at which I quickly dropped the fish on the sand. The blood oozed from the hole which the spike had made, and I thought no more of it. However, some 30 minutes later I suddenly began to feel rather queer and, after a further 20 or 30 minutes, I felt so queer that I called Peni and told him what had happened. I said that I now felt so very queer that I thought we should call the expedition off and return to headquarters.

However he did not seem too worried and thought that such a decision was too precipitate. He examined the fish briefly and then produced from one of his pockets a used razor blade. He then proceeded to light a fire of twigs on the seashore, and held the razor blade in the flames for two or three minutes. He then said that he proposed to use the razor blade to make a cut in my thumb about an eighth of an inch long above and below the hole made by the fish's spike. To this I submitted, feeling that it was probably a sensible aim to enlarge the hole in order that more blood containing the poison might be exuded. That was partly the aim apparently for, after making the cuts, Peni squeezed the thumb hard, expelling more blood. As he then desisted, I thanked him, assuming that action was complete. In response to my enquiry, however, he said that further action was needed. When I asked him what more was required, he astonished me by saying "Now, Sir, all you have to do is to urinate on the hole and cuts as hard and as much as you can". Feeling pretty queer at that time, I did not at first take in what he had said but, when I asked him to repeat it, he did so. At that stage I gave a feeble laugh, even though it was impossible to believe that he might be joking. So I did as I was told.

I can only say that within maybe an hour my feelings of queerness had passed and that I felt completely normal once more, so much so that I suggested that we should all resume fishing.

Whilst the castor oil cum brandy treatment which I had received for fish poisoning in Ocean Island was perhaps an understandable cure in the circumstances, this new cure was not so immediately obvious. I have no doubt that there is some good chemical or other reason for my having urinated on the wound to offset the poison; but I do not know of it and shall leave the explanation to those more versed in such matters. But, again, the local remedy proved amazingly effective.

So nearly 50 years later, I was able to recall the incident and show the scar to Peni as proof of it. I told him that I vaguely suspected that he had been joking or showing off in his advice, by taking a chance with his used razor blade, but that I had felt too queer at the time to protest. For his part, he said that he hoped that he had not shocked me with his advice, but he felt sure that his proposed cure would work successfully.

The final example of what I have termed local remedies - in this instance, however, medical attention - is perhaps the most interesting of all, though at the time it was the most worrying for me. Some three months after I had been posted to Funafuti, I felt, to my dismay, that something unpleasant was happening to my right leg. An apparently large vein, running from roughly the inside of my ankle up past the inside of my knee and continuing up the inside of my thigh, became inflamed and resembled a pencil in that it became quite hard. Not having experienced this before, I called the Native Medical Practitioner over to my quarters. He was a big, burly Gilbertese by the name of Tutu Tekanene, who had passed through the six-year course at the Fiji Medical School with distinction. He had a charming personality and a high level of competence. He was liked and trusted by all.

After examining my leg in detail, however, he confessed that he had never seen the particular ailment before. Later, after examining the meagre and out-of-date selection of books on medicine in his pharmacy, he had to confess that he was still none the wiser and reluctant to suggest any treatment which might benefit me. Meanwhile, he confined me to my quarters, advising me to rest as much as possible.

The days passed but unfortunately, though the inflammation receded slightly, the pencil-like sensation of the vein did not seem to change much. In desperation, Tutu tried out on me most of the limited stock of medicines which he had in his small pharmacy - all to no avail.

Unfortunately, the European Medical Officer normally stationed in the Ellice Islands, a Scot by the name of Duncan Macpherson, was away on long leave and the nearest European Medical Officer was some 750 miles away across the sea on Tarawa. But, in any case, it was not possible to seek medical advice from overseas since, though I had a battery operated wireless set which could receive broadcasts, there was no transmitting set.

So matters persisted for some weeks until one day when Tutu told me that he had taken the liberty of discussing my complaint with the old white-haired Samoan pastor, a familiar figure in all Ellice Islands, in response to the old man's enquiry about my ill-health. He said that the pastor would like, if he might, to come and have a look at the leg since he felt that he might be able to effect a cure. Tutu himself was somewhat sceptical, though privately he would admit that some native cures did in fact work, though as a Government trained and qualified Native Medical Practitioner he could not make such an admission publicly.

However, having been house-bound, if not bed-bound, for some weeks, I told Tutu that I was quite happy for the old pastor to come and have a look at the leg. So he and Tutu came two days later. The old man spent some time looking at, and feeling, the leg, and making a number of enquiries about any previous attacks, the length of time of my current ailment, and so on. He then said that he thought there were two possible methods by which he might be able to effect a cure of my condition, and he promised to return with Tutu on the morrow. This they did and he proceeded to massage the vein softly with refined and scented coconut oil, after which he promised to return in two days' time.

He and Tutu returned as promised but, after examining the leg, the old man admitted that the first method by which he had hoped to effect a cure by massage had failed. He therefore proposed to try another method. From a small bag, he then drew out what looked rather like a thin cigar, some five inches long, of a seemingly soft and silky texture, and whiteish in colour. It was made, I learned afterwards, from the dried silky part of the tiger-lily flower. He then asked for a lighted candle and, upon this being brought, he held the cigar-shaped object in the flame, until it resembled a lighted cigar. Warning me that the treatment was slightly drastic and would be rather painful, he then proceeded to cauterize the vein from top to bottom by pressing the 'cigar' briefly but firmly along the vein. As this covered a length of some three feet, and necessarily took some time, the continued application of the 'cigar' (off the end of which he blew the ash frequently) was excruciatingly painful and it required no little stoicism to endure it. However, I was determined to accept the pain if it would result in a cure. Before they left, the old man massaged the whole area of the vein with his coconut oil, and said that they would return in two days' time.

On their return, the inflammation had almost disappeared as had also the hardness of the vein. The old man was delighted with the results of his treatment and again massaged the whole vein with coconut oil gently as before. Indeed, he repeated the massage treatment for several days thereafter, until the inflammation and hardness of the vein had completely disappeared. It was not long before I was able to move around normally once more.

During one of the later visits, I could see that Tutu was clearly worried about something and, when we were alone, I asked him what was on his mind. After a pause, he replied in a voice in which anxiety and earnestness were mixed:-

"Sir, here am I, a fully trained and qualified Native Medical Practitioner, who has been trained for six years in surgery, physics and other branches of medicine and taken the Hippocratic oath, and yet here I stand by and watch the administration of crude native cures. Sir, Dr. Mac will have me immediately sacked if he hears of this on his return. I have sworn Temete and the pastor to silence. Please promise me that you will never tell Dr. Mac."

Seeing that he was deeply and sincerely anxious about this, I naturally had no hesitation in making such a promise. I would only add here, however, that Dr. Macpherson, alas, never returned to the Ellice Islands where he had previously laboured so effectively, but died before the war in the far Pacific.

It was not till many years later that the vein again caused me some trouble, but in the meanwhile I learned from a Medical Officer that at that time, long before preventive or curative drugs were available, the usual treatment for thrombophlebitis, for such my ailment had been, was the application of heat in some form such as a 'mud' pack. So the old pastor's cure was right in principle, even if somewhat drastic in its application.

The old man would accept no gift for himself for curing me, so I gave him a generous donation to his church which gave him much pleasure.

But that is not quite the end of the story. During my confinement to my quarters, Tutu and my servant Temete (Timothy) had, apart from teaching me the Gilbertese language as a result of which I was able to pass my higher standard language some months later, accorded me the most unremitting care and attention, since they were almost as worried as I was about this unidentifiable malady. So, one evening when they were visiting my quarters, I said that I should like to recognize their kind and considerate services by making each of them a small gift. Both were clearly embarrassed at my suggestion. They, like any ordinary Gilbertese whom I knew, were only too pleased and happy to have been of assistance to me, and looked for neither reward nor gain. After discussion, they said that they would like to consider my kind and generous suggestion, and would speak to me further of it later on.

They were both visiting me about a week later when, after some preliminary talk, I asked them if they had decided what presents they would like to be given. Again, both looked very embarrassed but eventually Tutu, the elder of the two, spoke thus:-

"Well, Sir, we have considered your kind offer and we really feel that there is no reason for you to make any gift to us. Each of us in our own way have merely been doing our duty and we feel that a gift to mark such acts superfluous. However, we are truly delighted that you have been cured and we hope that you will always think of us as true and faithful friends of your's; we should like, therefore, if we may, to suggest that you should have our names tattooed on your arms, so that you will never forget us, as we shall never forget you".

I must confess that the proposal startled me for it was the last thing in the world which would have occurred to me. However, I could not see any reasonable objection to it, and I was anxious that they appreciate the sincerity of my thanks for all they had done. So I expressed my pleasure at, and acceptance of, their suggestion. When I asked who would undertake the tattooing, and when, Tutu replied that they would return on the following day and would do it themselves. (Maybe they felt that I might have second thoughts about the proposal if immediate action was not taken).

So they returned on the following day, armed with some refined and scented coconut oil, some needles, and an old oil lamp with a longish glass chimney. The lamp was lit, and the wick turned up, so that it smoked heavily, and it was not long before there was an ample supply of carbon, which was scraped off the chimney and mixed with the coconut oil. The needles were dipped into this mixture. Then, whilst one of them grasped my upper arms tightly so that the skin was taut, the other, armed with a needle and a little wooden mallet, proceeded to undertake the tattooing of their names on my arms. Mercifully, it was not so painful as the cure of my vein had been.

And, if this part of the story should not be believed, I can only say that those two names "Tutu" and "Temete" are still there, tattooed on my upper arms till this day for all who wish to see; and they will still be there when I depart this life. Tutu, alas, has already passed on; ~~Temete~~ became a leading politician but has now, I believe, retired. Both were tried and true friends, than whom I could never ask for better.

I even have another name tattooed on one of my thighs, but that's another story.