CHAPTER II.—ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL NOTES ON THE BANTU TRIBES OF SOUTH AFRICA.

1. Anthropological Notes.

For anthropological data referring to the Bantu tribes of South Africa, the reader is referred to Appendix No. 1, by the late Dr. G. A. Turner. Here it will suffice to reiterate Dr. Turner’s warning that the first impression of splendid physique gained on glancing at the dark-skinned and well-conditioned Kafir in the nude is apt to be misleading and that both in height, chest measurement and chest expansion, as well as in cranial capacity and weight of brain, the Bantus fall behind the Europeans.

They are described by Theal as follows: "Frame robust; hair crisp; colour, brown to deep black; weapons, assegai, knobkerrie, shield; in the northern tribes, battle-axe and bow-and-arrow; well-constituted system of tribal government; habitations, huts of thatch on a strong wooden framework; domestic animals, the ox, goat, sheep, dog, poultry; language, harmonious and musical."

While it may readily be conceded that the Kafirs are smaller in build than Europeans, it would be a mistake to suppose that they are inferior to the European races in physical endurance or, apart from their liability to certain bacterial and parasitic infection, in health. Under their natural conditions, the males are capable of tireless exertion in the pursuit of game and in military expeditions; and the women carry heavy weights and work long hours at the "stamping" of mealies and the preparation of food, without serious fatigue. In industry, too, the Bantu work long hours without intervals for rest or food and yet gain rather than lose weight.

Their mode of life under tribal conditions is, on the whole, calculated to provide health and happiness, and merits a short description at this point, although certain aspects of it will be dealt with in greater detail in the body of the Report.

Theal gives the following description of their housing arrangements: "The huts of the tribes along the coast were shaped like domes or beehives and were formed of strong frames thatched with reeds or grass.

Note.—"Bantu" includes all the Native tribes of South Africa except the Bushmen and the Hottentots of the western portion of the Cape Province.

"Kafir" (or Kaffir) is a term not so much used now as formerly. It applied to certain of the Bantu inhabitants of the eastern portion of the Cape Province, including the Xosa and Galeka, but had not an exact tribal limitation. Sometimes the term is employed even more loosely as meaning any Native.

"Coloured" person.—This term, as commonly used in South Africa, means a person of mixed descent, usually Eurafrican.
They were proof against rain or wind. The largest were about seven or eight metres in diameter and from two metres and a fifth to two metres and a half in height at the centre. They were entered by a low, narrow aperture, which was the only opening in the structure. A hard and smooth floor was made of ant-heaps mixed with oxen’s blood and then kneaded with a round stone. When this had set, it was painted with a mixture of cow-dung and water, which was the material used afterwards for keeping it in good order. In the centre of the floor a fireplace was made by raising a band three or four centimetres in height and a metre or so in diameter and slightly hollowing the enclosed space. Against the wall of the hut were ranged various utensils in common use, the space around the fireplace being reserved for sleeping on. Here in the evening mats were spread upon which the inmates lay down to rest, each one’s feet being towards the centre. Above their heads the roof was glossy with soot and vermin swarmed on every side. It was only in cold or stormy weather that huts were occupied during the day, for the people spent the greater portion of their waking hours in the open air.” That things have not changed much may be inferred from the following note on some Tembu huts visited and described by Professor Cummins25 during a tour in the Transkei in 1927:

“The kraal was a collection of tidy clay-and-wattle huts, each about 20 to 23 feet across in one of the kraals, but as small as 16 feet across in another. One type was fitted with a pointed roof, another with a convex roof; both agreed in having no opening except a door, though considerable ventilation must take place through the thatched roof. There was a well ‘‘cow-dunged’’ floor and a central raised circle for a fire. There was no way of escape for the smoke except through the door and the roof, but it was stated that the fuel was lit in a bucket outside and then carried in red-hot, so that but few smoke fumes could arise inside. In the 16-foot hut only two persons were living, but the owner pronounced it suitable for ten. The under-surface of the roof was full of ‘‘stalactites’’ of smoke-soot but there was no heavy smell and the straw mats, neatly folded, took up little space. On the whole, taking into consideration that the inhabitants spend their day out of doors, and that the roof and, in certain types of hut, walls are permeable, I do not think these huts insanitary. While there may be some overcrowding at night, this does not seem common, and, though the fire-smoke may be irritating and the atmosphere stuffy for want of windows, every Native sleeps with his head covered and there is a fairly rapid exchange of air through roof and sometimes the walls without a draught.”

Illustrations of huts, both completed and in process of construction, are given later in the Report (Plates XX—XXIV after p. 208).

An interesting account of a Bantu kraal is given by Junod26 for the Thonga tribe in Portuguese East Africa and may be taken as applicable to tribal life amongst the Kafirs of South Africa. It is quoted here as a vivid pen picture of the kind of life which might, perhaps, be aimed at for the Natives by those responsible for their welfare.
The Thonga village is not a haphazard agglomeration of people. It is a social organism with a well-defined constitution and is regulated by strict laws. After all, it is merely an enlarged family; the headman and the old people who have fallen to his charge, his wives, his younger brothers and their wives, his married sons, his unmarried sons and daughters. All these people form a community whose life is most interesting to study.

. . . From the oxen kraal to the huts, from the square to the little wood, through the doors and in the reed yards, black forms are moving to and fro. Everybody seems busy. There is talking, laughing, playing and working. The expression 'working like a nigger' is hardly applicable, for they do not kill themselves with work. It would, however, be quite as great a mistake to believe that the Natives spend all their time in loafing about. Far from it.''

**Domestic Life.**

Polygamy prevails amongst the Bantu tribes, the number of wives depending largely upon the wealth of the male, since each wife has to be obtained through the payment of "lobola"* to the bride's parents. Amongst men of rank or outstanding wealth, a considerable number of wives may be kept, partly on account of the prestige which a large establishment commands. In the course of a recent visit to Portuguese East Africa by members of the Research Committee, a M'Chopi chief was found to be the happy owner of thirty wives, all housed in a large enclosure with a separate hut for each. But the poorer men have to be content with one or more wives, according to what they can afford.

The women do the domestic work, cooking the food, preparing beer and other fermented drinks, and keeping the floors of the huts clean by renewed smearing with cow-dung at short intervals, while the boys act as herds for the cattle and the men build and repair the huts, hunt in those districts where game still exists, and go for "contract periods" to work in the mines and other industries of the Union. It appears that the idea now prevails amongst the women that unless a man has "seen the world" or, in other words, done a period of work on the mines or in some other industry and returned with a supply of money, he is not a properly travelled and educated man; a salutary idea which helps the work of recruiting for the mines and tends to make the native territories richer and more prosperous.

Meals are usually served twice daily, the men and women eating separately. A light morning meal appears to be the rule, the substantial repast of the day being taken at sunset. Details of native diets will be given later in the Report (Part II, Chap. V); but it may be said that mealies (maize) form the basis of the day's "menu," being served "stamped" in the form of a crude flour, cooked in a stew with meat, oil, fat, vegetables or other constituents, or they may be eaten "on the cob"; served as "porridge," or as cakes; and, fermented into an acid and

---

* Lobola = bride-price. Traditionally paid in cattle.
slightly alcoholic drink, as “marewu.” “Kafir corn” or millet (Sorghum vulgare) is also used for making flour and, after “sprouting,” is used as the basis of the beer which is such a popular drink amongst the Bantu. This “Kafir beer” is regarded by them as both a food and a drink and appears to have valuable qualities as a source of certain of the vitamins. Monkey nuts (Arachis hypogea) are a favourite article of diet and are used also as a source of oil. The women are very clever at finding edible roots, fungi and other sources of vegetable food growing naturally around the kraals. Potatoes, sweet potatoes, manioc, rice and other vegetables are cultivated; and many leaves are used as spinach.

There are many varieties of wild fruit, employed both as food and as sources of fermented alcoholic beverages. In Portuguese East Africa the coco-nut palm, the pineapple and other imported plants bear fruit which is much used and greatly appreciated.

Cattle are seldom slaughtered for food, being too valuable as “capital,” but are kept for use as “lobola” or for supplying milk. Any animal, however, that dies of disease or through accident is eaten; and goats and sheep are occasionally killed on ceremonial occasions. Game makes a welcome addition, if available, but is now so rare as to be almost unobtainable in the Transkei and Ciskei. Locusts are often eaten. Fish is popular in Portuguese East Africa but less so, it seems, in the Transkei. There are certain taboos which in some places forbid the eating of eggs except to the very young.

Milk is an important article of diet and is used as an acid drink called “amaas” or “amasi,” a goatskin or calabash being kept outside the hut to which fresh milk is added daily. A little milk is always left in the skin or calabash to bring about acidification in the new milk which is added daily.

Unhappily, with the growth of population which has proceeded without any corresponding increase in the extent of the grazing grounds, the supply of this acidified milk, one of the most valuable constituents of the Native diet, is no longer adequate. In fact, it appears to be true that the Native diet is changing for the worse, partly through poverty and the restriction of grazing land in proportion to the excessive numbers of cattle, partly through the attempt to follow Western ideas in clothing and amusements, and partly through the facilities now available for the purchase of less nutritious but tasty and easily-prepared tinned and preserved foods. This deterioration is much less noticeable amongst the tribes residing in Portuguese East Africa, which is still a land of plenty, both from the ease of cultivation and the abundance of natural foods in the form of fruit, vegetables and game; but there seems reason to fear that, with the gradual approach towards European standards, the food is less nourishing than formerly in the Transkei and to a still greater extent in the crowded Ciskei.

Health Factors in Native Life.

Natives living under their primitive tribal conditions have no clue to the causes of disease and death, but they are not without theories to explain them.
Underlying these theories is the general belief in magic. When an acute disease supervenes in the course of a healthy life, it is usual to attribute this to the magical machinations of an enemy. The natural remedy is to seek out the causative agent, the "witch," and punish or destroy him. Death, too, is looked upon as an evil influence bringing danger to others along with it. Junod, speaking of the Thonga tribes, says: "Death is not only a sad event . . . but a dreadful contaminating power which puts all objects and people in the neighbourhood of the deceased, all his relations, even those dwelling far away . . . into a state of uncleanness." While the belief in magic as a cause of disease does not help in its prevention or cure, the idea as to the "contaminating power" of death appears to lead to customs of a very hygienic kind. Thus, the rugs and mats of the deceased are usually buried with him—an excellent way of getting rid of articles which are perhaps contaminated and capable of infecting others.

Again, the death of the headman of a village usually leads to the destruction of his hut; thus getting rid of a possible source of infection. Further, if the deaths go on occurring, the "divinatory bones" may be consulted and, as a result, the whole village deserted as if it were defiled and dangerous. The facility for cheap and easy construction of houses from simple materials makes these elementary measures of sanitation easy to carry out; and the destruction of the huts of persons dying of disease must help to cope with infectious maladies and must be especially valuable in the case of death from tuberculosis.

Even the huts built by the deceased for his wives are looked upon as contaminated after his death, at least for a time, and Junod describes how "all the widows sleep in the open, their huts, which belonged to the deceased, being taboo. If it rains they sleep in the other huts of the village." This prodigality in the construction or, when desired, the destruction of huts is, or should be, a factor of safety in the prevention of overcrowding. It is the custom for each wife of the headman of a kraal to be given a hut to herself; a sanitary as well as a prudent arrangement.

It appears likely that, in those districts where a hut tax is now claimed from the Natives, the latter appreciate the fact that each hut adds to the expense and therefore cut down the number of huts, making more of the unmarried members of the family sleep in each. This is an instance in which a valuable Native custom calculated to mitigate the spread of disease by the prevention of overcrowding may be lost under the regulations arising from contact with "civilization."

Again, the periodical renewing of the floor surface by cleaning out with cow-dung and ashes is a valuable measure, not only against vermin, but against bacteria.

It is also the custom amongst Natives, while in their huts, to spit into a little heap of sand or earth which is removed daily and disposed of outside the dwelling. This custom must help to limit the spread of tuberculosis.
Another valuable custom, to which the attention of members of the Committee was called, especially in Portuguese East Africa, is the custom of building a separate hut of a "temporary" kind for the accommodation of persons suffering from chronic wasting diseases like tuberculosis. It seems to be true that the patient, thus isolated, is liable to be neglected and may not get much food, the prevailing idea being that it is kinder to let him die; but while hard on the individual, the measure is doubtless a valuable one in the protection of the community from infection. This custom, however, is rapidly dying out in the face of European standards of conduct.

Another habit which, while it appears "stuffy" to Europeans, may be of some value in limiting the spread of respiratory infections is that of covering up the face and head with a fold of the blanket while sleeping. This habit is certainly to be encouraged where several individuals are sleeping round the fire in a native hut. It may, however, be risky instead of salutary if individuals exchange their blankets; an occurrence which is said to be unusual.

Much might be written about the witch doctors and their methods; but although many persons well acquainted with native customs hold that these magicians possess some interesting secrets and have a great knowledge of the properties of herbs in the treatment of disease, their methods have more interest for the therapeutist than for the sanitarian and need not be considered in this summary.

2. Historical Notes.

The facts brought forward in Chapter I. will serve to show that their past history may have a bearing upon the present health conditions of the South African Natives.

Theal18 gives the following account of the distribution of Native tribes towards the close of the fifteenth century, when Europeans first had communications with the Natives of South Africa:— see Map facing p. 184.

"The belt of land comprising the lowest and the second terrace along the western coast, from about Cape Cross southward to the Cape of Good Hope and thence eastward to the Bashee River, was occupied, though thinly, by Hottentot tribes. The same people were to be found along the lower courses of the Vaal and Modder Rivers and along the banks of the Orange from the junction of the Vaal to the sea.

"The Bantu, at that time, occupied the choicest part of the country north of a straight line from Cape Cross to Port Natal* and extended south of that line into the territory now known as Basutoland and also along the eastern coast as far as the Bashee River. They were not to be found in the remaining portions of South Africa.

"Bushmen roamed over the entire country south of the Zambesi from sea to sea and were the only inhabitants of the rugged mountains and arid plains between the Hottentot and Bantu borders. As they could hold their own fairly well against the Hottentots they were more numerous along the western and southern coasts than along the eastern, where the Bantu had better means of exterminating them."

---

* i.e. from about half-way up the coast of S.W. Africa to Durban.
Of these three races, only the Bantu need consideration to-day. The Bushmen and Hottentots lacked the ability to retain their tribal entities under the stress of contact with European settlers in the south and east and Bantu aggressors from the north. Apart from a few remote clans still surviving in the less accessible parts of the Kalahari Desert and South-West Africa, their blood persists only in the Coloured population of the Cape, the descendants of mixed mating between their females and European, Bantu, Malay, Indian and other immigrants. The cranial capacity of the three Native races of South Africa, as calculated by Professor Flower, was found to be as follows:—Bushmen, 1,288 c.c.; Hottentot, 1,407 c.c., and Bantu, 1,485 c.c., the average capacity for Europeans being 1,497 c.c. It is interesting to note that only the Bantu, with their close approximation to the cranial capacity of the European, have succeeded in surviving, and even increasing considerably in number, through the critical years of early contact with Europeans and entry into industrial pursuits.

Although the Bantu tribes do not constitute a definite ethnological group, the very name, Bantu, signifying merely “people,” they possess many characters in common and represent a far higher type than their predecessors on South African soil; a type well calculated to prevail, as indeed it did prevail, when pitted against opponents of an earlier culture.

In the words of MacMillan,19 “by the eighteenth century the Bantu were firmly established as the only effective occupants of territory stretching from far away in the north down at least to the Kei. In the course of their expansion they displaced, and doubtless slew, the Bushmen and either expelled or absorbed the Hottentots.”

As the whole of the Native industrial population to-day, except for the “Coloured” industrials of the Cape, consists of Bantu, the history of these tribes, so far as it is known, is worthy of attention in connexion with the tuberculosis problem in South Africa; and more especially their history of “contact” with the outside world. But, while accurate information on this point is needed, it must be admitted that very little exists. In tribes without a script, tradition takes the place of written record; and tradition, especially in the case of peoples of a semi-nomadic type, tends to be vague and unreliable. Extensive relics of ancient gold mining and interesting ruins of buildings constructed of dressed stone, such as the great Zimbabwe, suggest that a much higher standard of technical skill and a demand for gold and other metals far in excess of the simple needs of the Bantu of to-day, must have existed in South Africa in former times. With these relics as a basis for speculation, many theories have been formulated as to contact with ancient civilization from overseas. Thus, Dr. Carl Peters20 did not hesitate to identify the old gold mining area inland from the east coast, between the Sabi and Zambesi Rivers, with the land of Punt from which the Egyptians of 1500 B.C., and earlier, obtained supplies of gold. The tri-literal root AFR occurring in such names as “Africa,” Mount “Fura” and others was, for Dr. Peters, a survival of the word Ophir; the land of gold from which Solomon obtained his supplies. The
evidence adduced by Dr. Peters is interesting but hardly conclusive; and it must be admitted that, while Egyptian, Greek, Roman and Jewish stories and traditions hint at a vague knowledge of the east coast of Africa, some of these tales may just as well have referred to the much more accessible countries of Abyssinia and the mountainous districts along its northern and western borders where alluvial gold is still to be found in considerable quantities.

Theal,21 without attempting to draw such definite conclusions as Dr. Carl Peters, still finds the evidence sufficient to justify the following statement, with which many will agree:—

"At some unknown period in the past, people more civilized than the Bantu, but still far from reaching the level of modern Europeans, made their appearance on the central table-land of Africa south of the Zambesi. They were almost certainly Asiatics, and they must have come down in vessels to some part of the coast and then gone inland, for no traces of them have been found to the north. They constructed buildings of dressed stone without cement or mortar... and they were gold miners on a very extensive scale. Their abandoned mines—often of considerable size—are found throughout a vast extent of territory, so they must not only have been numerous but must have occupied the country a very long time."

Recent investigations by Miss Caton Thompson lead her to bring the date of the great Zimbabwe down to mediaeval times, and she finds evidence, in the absence of all but Bantu implements, suggestive that the buildings were the work of these tribes themselves.

Whatever may be the truth about Zimbabwe, one thing is certain—that "over a vast extent of territory," as Theal says, there must have been contact between the Bantu tribes and more civilized immigrants from overseas.

Passing on from the period of archaeological speculation to historical records, it is known, from the voyage of Vasco da Gama in 1497 that Natives, almost certainly Hottentots, were encountered at St. Helena Bay on the west coast; that a different type of Natives, evidently Bantu, were met with on the Limpopo; that Arabic speech and traces of Indian culture existed at Quilemane, called by da Gama the "Rio dos Bons Sinaes" on that account; and that Arabs with trading vessels and in some places stone buildings, were found as masters of coastal settlements at Mozambique, Sofala, Mombasa, Malindi and Kilwa.

From these records it is clear that, up to 1497, sea-going Arabs, already mixed in blood with the Bantu, yet dominating them and employing them as slaves and as soldiers, had long been the masters of the east coast and its islands and that they traded to India, Persia and perhaps to Eastern Europe and North Africa the slaves and the gold so readily obtainable inland. This brings into the realm of certainty a prolonged and fairly intimate contact of the coastal Bantu tribes with the civilizations of North Africa and Asia prior to the end of the fifteenth century; a contact that must almost certainly have brought with it some degree of exposure to tuberculous infection. Nor was
the risk of exposure confined to the coast, since there must have been slave-trading centres and posts in the interior.

From that time onwards, Portuguese settlements began to appear and the Arab power to wane; so that now it was a question of coastal contact with Europeans and the steady and increasing penetration of soldiers, traders and missionaries from the coast between Delagoa Bay and Mozambique into the interior. With the arrival of Dutch colonists at the Cape in 1652, a new growing point of European penetration was formed, but this at first affected only the Hottentots and Bushmen. It was not for another hundred years that the colonists came into serious touch with the "Kafirs," as the Bantu came to be called; the name being adopted from the Arabs and signifying "Unbelievers."

The earliest recorded conflict between white colonists and Kafirs, according to MacMillan, was in 1702, when a cattle-bartering expedition in the time of the younger Van der Stel had a serious skirmish with Kafirs three or four days west of the Gamtoos River, but it was not until 70 years later that this new racial factor was taken into official cognizance by the Government when, at the time of the first Kafir War, the Fish River was selected as a dividing line between the advancing colonists and the Bantu tribes. From the earliest years of the nineteenth century and onwards, the Ciskei and, later, the Transkei, was the scene of a steadily increasing penetration amongst the Bantu by British, Dutch, French and other missionaries and soldiers, farmers and magistrates, so that the partial isolation of the Bantu tribes in that area gave place to an increasing degree of "contact," a gradual modification of tribal habits and customs, the discarding of old beliefs and old disciplines for the new wine of Christianity, loss of land, subjection to taxation, and the resultant creation of a need for money and an obligation to work.

It is clear, then, that along the coast, at least, and probably also in the ancient gold-mining area of the interior and the routes connecting it with the coast, there must have been opportunities for "contact" between some of the Bantu peoples and aliens from overseas. It is certain, too, that these aliens, whether Egyptians, Phoenicians, Indians or merely Arabs, were derived from races in which large urban communities had reached a stage of civilization in which the gold, ivory, slaves and other products of the East African coast found a ready market; in other words, a stage at which luxury must have prevailed amongst the rich and overcrowding amongst the poor.

These are the conditions in which tuberculosis inevitably prevails and, in fact, we know from the pathological investigations on mummies carried out by Professor Elliot Smith and the late Dr. Armand Ruffer, that tuberculosis did exist in Egypt in dynastic times.

It is safe to assume, then, that certain elements of the Bantu peoples must have been in occasional contact with the germ of this disease brought by cases and "carriers" from the great towns of Asia, North Africa and, perhaps, Eastern Europe, during historic times and probably for long centuries of the unknown past.
Once the Portuguese arrived, the efforts of Christian missionaries to instruct and convert the Natives must have led to a still more formidable kind of contact. Slave-raiders and gold-traders are said to have been in the habit of killing all those members of a kraal too old to be carried off as slaves, and we may assume that the raiders had, themselves, been subjected to a very rigid selection during their long voyages and hardships, calculated to eliminate all except the healthy and robust. In these circumstances, the possibilities of transmission of tubercle bacilli to the Natives, though real, must have been very slight. But missionaries aim at settling among the Natives and getting into the closest possible touch with them by means of schools, churches, visits and so forth; and the missionary sticks to his post whether his health is good or bad—a form of devotion which may possibly have effects upon the temporal welfare of his flock. It will be conceded that the aggregation of Natives around mission stations and the resultant "contact" established with devoted persons from infected countries is more likely to break down the bacteriological isolation of primitive tribes than the devastating arrival and withdrawal of slave-raiding expeditions. All this "contact" along the coast of Africa was supplemented by the arrival in Cape Colony of Dutch, Huguenot and British settlers with their missionaries, soldiers and traders. And a formidable kind of exposure to tuberculosis was still to come when the improvement in ocean travel and the growing reputation of the South African climate led physicians in Europe to advise their consumptive patients to try a sea voyage and a period of residence in the sunny air of the Cape.

It would be rash, therefore, to assume that, even in remote times, the coastal tribes of Bantu were free from tuberculosis; and it may be taken as certain that the disease was frequently introduced among them from the sixteenth century onwards, and probably long before.

But there is another side to the question. To what extent do the present-day Bantu of South Africa represent the Bantu tribes with whom the Arabs came in contact? It must not be assumed that the Bantu tribes in ancient contact with the Arabs had any considerable dealings with the Bantu that later on made their way into the territories now constituting the Union of South Africa. According to Theal, "the territory of Sofala was occupied by Bantu in the ninth century of our era, but how far south that territory extended cannot be ascertained with precision. It is certain, however, that it did not pass the Sabi River and beyond it the only inhabitants were Bushmen. Westward its limit was short of the Mashonaland of our day, for down to much more recent times Bushmen alone occupied the border. Whether the tribe mentioned by Masoudi was the modern Karanga is uncertain, though in all probability it was. . . . There is no other tribe in South Africa which has so many individuals bearing traces of Arab, Persian and Indian blood as the Makaranga, which is due to the long continuance of Asiatic intercourse with them in past times."
Further on, Theal speaks of the "first billow* of Bantu invaders that rolled over the continent from the north-west to the south-east and that subsided on the shore of the Indian Sea between the Sabi River and Delagoa Bay. What set that billow in motion, what havoc it wrought on its way, what time it took on its course, are all among the unknown particulars of the past. Nothing more can be said with certainty than that the Batonga of the Zambesi Valley and of the eastern coast arrived there some time during the fifteenth century. When the ancestors of the Xosa, Tembus and Pondos reached the sea, the coast to the north was already occupied by the Batonga, so they turned to the south and entered the territory now known as Natal." Even as late as 1852, Döhne found a small section of the Amamosa still living in Natal.

The movements of tribes consequent upon the Zulu military exploits of Chaka and Mzilikazi in the early years of the nineteenth century carried the "billows" of Bantu penetration further still, until they broke against the advancing wall of Cape Colony settlers on the south­east and encountered the Dutch voortrekkers north of the Vaal.

The picture, then, is not one of static contact with coastal Arabs and Portuguese, but of a long series of tribal movements accompanied by all the stress and hardship of war and travel and stern selection by survival of the fittest. Woe to the old, the infirm and the infected under the conditions of such a journey. The merciful custom of the tribes was to desert the old and the fatally ill and leave them in the bush to die; and, as Theal says, "all the weaklings were destroyed in infancy." In these circumstances, a debilitating disease like tuberculosis was unlikely to flourish or to spread. Even the rapidly contagious smallpox, which decimated the already stationary Hottentots and some of the Tembu tribe between the Kei and the Bashie Rivers, failed to infect the fighting tribes. "The state of constant warfare in which these people lived" preserved them from the fate which had overtaken their neighbours.

It is difficult to imagine that cases of tuberculosis, even if such occurred sporadically from time to time, could have spread any more easily than does avian tuberculosis amongst wild birds or bovine tuberculosis amongst wild game. Occasional instances might occur, just as in game a recent example has been noted amongst kudu in the Cape Province; but the forced marches and the desertion of the infirm were calculated to kill off the weaklings and clear the tribe of infected persons.

There is, in fact, little or no evidence that tuberculosis was prevalent amongst the Bantu when they were first encountered by the white races. Lichtenstein encountered none in 1803-1806 and reports the absence of "cough, chronic disease and syphilis" amongst the Kafirs. Livingstone, in 1857, stated that "tuberculosis did not exist."

*Professor MacMillan thinks it possible that the "billows" of tribal movement may perhaps have been exaggerated and that the slow movement southwards may have been connected with intensive slave raiding to the north.
amongst the tribes of the interior with whom he was working. Theal speaks as follows: "Consumption, another fell disease that has worked havoc among many barbarous nations, was almost unknown in South Africa until recent years."

The carefully-weighed and cautious opinions of Macvicar, of Lovedale, in describing his experiences in British Central Africa from 1894 to 1900, are worth quoting in relation to the apparent absence of tuberculosis in parts of Africa remote from coastal contact with the Whites. "During the four years I was in charge of the medical work at the Blantyre Mission in the Shire Highlands," he writes, "I saw not a single case of any form of tuberculosis among the people living in the hill country... I confess that during these years I often wondered whether I could possibly be overlooking evidence of the disease, and I feel still that one should be very diffident in asserting a negative proposition of so sweeping a kind as that tuberculosis was absent from any locality. Yet the facts are that for four years I was in close touch with the people, seeing them daily in the dispensary and often visiting them in their villages, and though I was on the outlook for tuberculosis I did not see a single case."

He quotes letters from medical men showing that it was very rare or unknown in Southern Rhodesia, Bechuanaland, Basutoland and the Transvaal as recently as the early years of the nineteenth century and also, prior to the arrival of Europeans, among the Bantu tribes of Cape Colony. All this, however, had changed long before he started work at Lovedale, and he produces evidence of the increase of the disease in the Ciskei and Transkei in recent years.

On the other hand, it appears to have helped in the elimination of the Hottentots, amongst whom it was reported by J. W. D. Moodie, in 1820, to be very prevalent. None of the evidence is conclusive. In tribes cut off from the observation of trained physicians and living a life in which medical science has played no part, the presence or absence of tuberculosis can neither be asserted nor denied.

All that can be stated with certainty is that good observers, such as Livingstone and, later, Macvicar, with a special bent towards detecting the troubles of the Natives in order to relieve them, failed to notice cases amongst the tribes with which they were associated; that the conditions of life of these warrior communities were not such as to facilitate the survival of cases and the spread of infection; and that the behaviour of the present-day Bantu when infected with tuberculosis and exposed to physiological stress is not that which has come to be regarded as characteristic of the adult descendants of long generations of a tuberculized stock.

It looks as if the disease had only become prevalent in the Bantu tribes after they had settled down in fixed territories in contact with the "tuberculized" White races and had started on their present mode of life. As to the increase of tuberculosis among them during the last century, this subject will be discussed in the next Chapter.
Collection Number: AD1715

SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS (SAIRR), 1892-1974

PUBLISHER:
Collection Funder: Atlantic Philanthropies Foundation
Publisher: Historical Papers Research Archive
Location: Johannesburg
©2013

LEGAL NOTICES:

Copyright Notice: All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Disclaimer and Terms of Use: Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

People using these records relating to the archives of Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. While these digital records are true facsimiles of paper documents and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

This document forms part of the archive of the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), held at the Historical Papers Research Archive at The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.