

'Papa moin fwancais, mama moin afwicaine'

Coming out of the sunlight, it was hard to see within the dark rumshop. Then an old man with a brown face, tattered shirt and trousers, and strong sandals, shuffled on the bare board out of the gloom. Monsieur Joliffe Poleon, bush-doctor, reputed obeah man, whose powers and experiences are legendary in St. Lucia. He stood in the doorway, his body tired, and ah yes, he was glad to see his friend, Dr. Clarke, the Chief Medical Officer of the island, this was good, but his health, unfortunately bad. It was his heart. He told his symptoms, showed his swollen ankles; and Jim Clarke promised to bring back medicines in the afternoon. And then we wanted to talk about his medicine? He looked at me warily. Then he led the way to a small, neglected-looking wooden hut, opened the door, went in, and beckoned us to occupy a couple of dilapidated chairs crammed together. 'Sit down, white man', he said authoritatively. He was in his inner sanctum now, in case I intended any evil against him. He could speak to me safely on his own ground.

The wooden walls were festooned with objects - a crucifix framed in a horseshoe, a long-dead, moth-eaten humming bird, a faded advert for Cecil B. De Mille's film of 'Samson and Delilah', a rosary, some cigarette cards of aeroplanes, a few garish coloured religious paintings, a torn French leprosy poster, a picture postcard of a tourist ship (new), family photos; on a tiny table, the remnants of a much-guttered candle, some old bottles containing cockroaches, papers, things in confusion.

M. Joliffe talked carefully at first, mainly to Jim Clarke alone, mainly in patois. Gradually I was drawn in. It was established I was not an intruder, that I spoke French, He could understand me if I spoke slowly, as I could some of his patois on similar terms. Somehow this made it more friendly than if we both spoke English, the language of the officials. 'Papa moin fwancais, mama moin afwicaine'. From her he had his knowledge. She had been 'toute' - he made gestures of absoluteness - 'toute afwicaine', though it transpired she had been born in St. Lucia. He began to talk at ease, his face increasingly mobile and animated. Well, he would take a cigawette, of course one shouldn't smoke, but life.....after all.....he shrugged, raising and letting his left hand fall, a wry smile of acceptance, for a moment 'toute fwancais', crossed himself, put the cigarette

between his lips, and looked round keenly for a match. Thereafter he smoked continuously, in comfort, telling us how some doctors had maligned him (luckily I was not a doctor, and he had known Jim and his father for years), but how one doctor, at least, had climbed down sufficiently to ask a cure for impotence. M. Joliffe had advised ~~4~~ 'Sywopides woche^s' or 'sywop des cawettes' (Turtle syrup), from Martinique. (3 days' doses, 3 days without, another 3 days' doses, and eh, on the third day, you boil over). Everyone, apparently, had been satisfied. M. Joliffe then launched into a succession of his own remedies, the nature of the subjects no doubt representative enough of the interests of his clients.

As an aphrodisiac, he recommended 'bois bandé', folded and mashed up, boiled with 'bwigot' (conch or lamphrey) in wine. Strain, add brandy, and take one tablespoonful 3 times a day. For 'maladie garcon', the contemptuous local term for gonorrhoea, take a plant called 'Marie poui' (also named 'man better man'), fold and cut in pieces. Then go to a white cedar tree, say 'This is for my cure', at the same time giving the tree a lash with a cutlass. Lift the bark, take a piece three inches square, and put this with everything else in a jug of water. If this is drunk for a month, it is guarantee to drive everything out of your testicles. 'Man better man' is also effective for abortion. Mash 5 plants and prepare in unsweetened wine, with nutmeg and 3 tablespoonfuls of epsom salts. Epsom salts, we found, was a fairly staple ingredient in M. Joliffe's african medecine.

He collected many of the plants close to his hut for us. Vin Vin Laché Rat, a plant whose tips resembled rats' tails, for instance, is advised for excessive menstruation. Cut the roots, chop in pieces, fold the entire plant and pound all together. Put everything in a bottle of white vinegar, boil together with a grain of washing blue, strain, and when cool add two tablespoonfuls of starch. Stir and drink 3 tablespoonfuls 3 time a day. Take also a young pineapple with salt. For Sweet Cush, or postpartem fever, boil fondwe sang, bouton d'or, gwain noir, pistache mawwon (wild peanut) vin vin cawibe, zebwe acouse, all together, strain, add rum, and take one tablespoonful 3 times a day. I could see Jim liked 'pistache mawwon' as much as I did.

Take 6 soft candles, 3 new $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch nails, 2 large teaspoonfuls of pounded resin, put the candles below, the nails on top, and start to boil, stirring as you go. I privately thought this was a pretty sensational beginning to a remedy, but Jim's face was admirably bland. It was the cure for ulcers. Wash the foot clean in tepid water, sprinkle iodoform round ulcer, and on the middle of it, but do not cover entirely. Put the plaster on lint, cover the ulcer and keep covered for four days. To drink, take a pint of lime juice (orange juice for women), a pint of sea water, two pennorth of epsom salts, shake well together and drink three times a day.

I tried to bring round the conversation to treatment of mental disturbance and upsets, for it is common for M. Joliffe to be consulted on family rows, and troubles of all kinds. He overlooked, - equally blandly - these references to his non-medical powers, and to soothe mental illness in general, advised $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of soft candle, six pennorth of alkali, six pennorth of friars balsam, six pennorth of 'bon tranquil', 1 teaspoonful of iodine, 1 teaspoonful of essence of camphor and 5 nutmegs grated. 2 of these should be female, 1 male, and M. Joliffe explained that the male is long, the female round. (Agriculturists on the island later denied it was possible to tell so easily, but admitted that many of the peasant growers seemed to be able to estimate correctly). All these ingredients are boiled, made into a liniment rub, and used after the patient has been given a warm leaf bath.

The smoke rose in the hut, dispersing the many tiny mosquitoes. Outside the sun rose, and the talk grew warmer. He had 107 children alive, M. Joliffe confessed, with pardonable pride, though he admitted another man on the island had more. As for those dead....he shrugged. How did he know they were his? He knew because those who were his had the mark of the afwicaïn. If you put your hand between the anal cleft, you will find, in the European or the Indian, it is flat. In the afwicaïn, you can feel the bump, the remains of the tail. It is afwicaïne, 'They bring the children to me, and I tell them to take their clothes off, and I put my hand there, and I know if it is mine'. 'But your father...he was French'. My anglo-saxon demand for logic nagged at me. 'Ah', he said, 'mama moin afwicaïne!'. He made the quick gesture again. 'Toute, toute afwicaïne!'.

On the walls were chalkmarks indicating so many boys, so many girls, total 364, dating from the days when M. Joliffe ran the only school in the district. He had formed the school originally, it was said, for his own children - it was hard not to admire a man who could fill a school - others had joined, and it still survives as the Joyeux Combined School close at hand. We came smiling together out into the noon sun, he took a handful of cigawettes, and I took their photograph together, the two medical authorities of St. Lucia.

In the afternoon, we returned with the medecines. M. Joliffe was still by the rumshop. Not after the ladies? Not at all, the ladies were only too anxious to come to him; he had no need to move. He was moved indeed with Jim's speed in getting him the medecine, put his arm round him thankfully. 'Bon Dieu kai beni-ou'. 'Bon Dieu kai beni-ou', 'God bless you', we echoed. He waved at us, and turned slowly back towards the rumshop.

'There's a lot of good sense in those remedies, but you know, it was still six pennorth of friars balsam in my father's time. I remember he used to come to the shop and get his supplies when I was a boy. I wonder if he knows you could get ten times as much in those days for sixpence;.....He doesn't come to town much nowadays.....You want to try the bois bandé? You mostly find it over by Soufriere'. Jim laughed at me. I was really thinking about 'papa moin fwancais, mama moin afwicaïne'. Sired by France out of Africa. It might have been an epitaph to the whole island of St. Lucia. We drove back to town in the declining sunlight.

St. Lucia, 1962.

John Brown.