

ance of plant growth, in spite of being themselves aware that plants do respond to *electric* vibrations.

In the part of Rhodesia of which I am speaking there are many deposits of mercurial earth which, at first, and not allowing for its atomic weight, seemed to promise payable mineral underneath. This gave a reaction entirely different from anything else, and both a friend and myself felt our arms twisted upwards and outwards in a distinctly unpleasant manner. About this time deaths occurred among the trek oxen, and a post-mortem examination showed these deaths to be due to the condition of their livers. From enquiries of the native cattle 'boys' we found that some of the oxen had been in the habit of licking the earth under a particular bank. This earth we ourselves tasted and found it to have an astringent salty flavour and responded to mercurial tests. We had run out of coarse salt of which the cattle are very fond, and doubtless the daily mercurial lick with its known effect on the liver was the cause of the deaths which ceased after we barricaded up this source of supply.

Another effect of this mercurial soil was seen in a large field of tobacco plants where a wide belt of this earth had given a noticeably different colour to the leaves. What effect this might have on the taste of the tobacco is a matter for speculation, for the Tobacco Combines at this time temporarily discouraged its production in parts of South Africa thereby causing distress and heavy losses to the growers.

Space would not permit me to speak of the varied ways in which we tried out our dowsing 'sensitiveness', but we always felt that any apparent discovery lacked the confirmatory evidence of experienced and scientific dowers.

For this reason alone a hearty welcome should be given to this new Society and publication which, due to our usual British caution, are both long overdue.

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## A YORUBA DOWSER

By S. LEITH-ROSS

**A**LTHOUGH I had heard rumours in various parts of Nigeria of men who were able to discover water beneath the soil and even to estimate at what depth it could be found, I unfortunately had not investigated these rumours and have actually seen only one native who might be called a dowser.

I was in Ilorin City, capital of Ilorin Province, Nigeria, in 1929, and wished to have a well dug in the compound of a small school

for native girls. The school stood on high ground, in the centre of the native town. The compound was some three-quarters of an acre in extent with the school buildings running along one side, and the rest open ground. There were wells in the surrounding compounds but the water supply was known to be poor, and in the dry season, which we were then in, many of the wells ran dry. The 'Chief of the Well Diggers' was called in, an elderly man who spoke Yoruba but who, from his looks, appeared to have some Hausa blood in him. Judging from his white gown and turban he was a Muhammadan, but in Ilorin Province Islam and paganism blend easily together. Accompanied by three or four satellites, he came into the compound and stood motionless by the entrance. He carried no instrument and made no movement with his hands. After one look round the compound he seemed to 're-collect' himself for a moment and then made an almost imperceptible forward motion with his chin. (These chin movements play a great part both in Yoruba and Hausa speech and can give a remarkably accurate idea of distance.) Immediately the men who were with him and who had been watching him closely sprang forward to a spot near the centre of the compound and drove a stake a little way into the ground. The dowser remarked in an offhand way that water would be found there, at a depth of about twenty feet, and walked away. I wanted to question him as to his methods, but it was one of the rare occasions on which I felt hostility on the part of a native and thought it wiser not to. Indeed the whole time I was under the impression that, except for earning his fee, he did not care whether he found water or not. If he had been on his mettle and really wished to find a good supply, his preparations might have been more elaborate.

Later on a well was dug in the spot he had indicated and water was found at twenty-three feet. The supply was not very good and the well was deepened another two feet, but though the water never actually failed, it remained muddy and came in slowly.

While the dowser was in the compound neither a native woman, who was with me, nor the workmen showed any sign of awe. They were interested, but evidently looked upon the incident as a quite ordinary one. When questioned, the intelligent and much-travelled native woman said she had heard of dowsers in other parts of Nigeria but knew no details and did not know of their using instruments. I did not ask her about metal divining nor have I heard of it from any other source.

The subject is certainly one that should be studied and, as in the native mind it does not seem to be connected with magic, it should not be too difficult to obtain information.