

NOTES ON CURRENT LITERATURE.

THE SAVAGE AS SCIENTIST.

These notes rarely, if ever, stray outside the circle of literary productions known, more or less accurately, as scientific journals. There seems, however, no reason why the rule should not occasionally be broken if it appears advantageous so to do. Hence, without further apology, attention is directed to a curious paper by a writer with the pseudonym of FULAHN,* in *Blackwood's Magazine* for May, 1927. FULAHN is apparently a magistrate in Tanganyika, and his reason for putting pen to paper is perhaps best indicated in his own words :

“ To aver that many a half-naked African may hold the keys to unsolved mysteries by which the keenest brains of science have been baffled would seem an assertion even more crazy, if that were possible, than the mumbo-jumbo with which half-witted witch doctors, grovelling before a juju-pot, are said to delude the stupid black himself.

“ But the fact remains that many an epoch-making scientific truth discovered by white men during the past few years was chit-chat and women's gossip in the backveld kraals of Africa centuries ago.”

He sets out to prove the truth of his contention and, though perhaps one is tempted to discount his evidence when he is found speaking of trypanosomes as the germs of malaria, he brings certain interesting facts to light.

Yet it must remain more than a little doubtful if the form of paresis for the cure of which the witch doctors of Iramba send their patients to malarial swamps to be bitten by mosquitoes is, as he states, G.P.I., especially as this therapeutic method was, according to the author, in vogue 400 years ago. In any case, however, it is sufficiently remarkable that a negro tribe should long ago have learned not only to make use of one disease against another, but to have recognized, albeit empirically, that mosquitoes can transmit malaria.

There seems to be no doubt about it for, said Mgendu, the medicine man :

“ The vidudu of paralysis must fight with the pilintu of malaria so that the pilintu may be devoured : then must Kinga eat of the nzizi chungu (bitter roots) and he will be strengthened.”

“ Vidudu ” and “ pilintu ” are Iramba names used for mysterious causes of disease which get into a man's blood ; in this instance employed, unwittingly, for *Treponema pallidum* and the malarial plasmodium.

FULAHN points out that quinine itself was discovered by savages before it was known to the civilised world and that, quite apart from the Iramba, the Masai and Nandi warriors, in what is now Kenya Colony, not only knew that

* FULAHN. (1927). The Savage as Scientist. *Blackwood's Magazine*. (1839), 577 ; May.