

The power of superstition, the belief in legend, the acceptance of witchdoctor magic or the death or devastation that can be produced by an angry spirit or god are very much part of life in rural Africa.

One can study a case history involving witchcraft and produce an argument to disprove the occult claim — but you will never convince the believers that coincidence or inevitability was the reason for the happening.

A doctor might logically be expected to have definite views on the question of the supernatural, particularly where it involves human death.

But for Doctor Hope Trant this is one subject on which she is reticent to commit herself. Doctor Trant, now 79, has spent 43 years in Africa and a great part of that time living in remote tribal areas.

Her comment: 'It is not that I either believe or don't believe in these happenings. To many people such beliefs are in their natural make-up. Over the years I have seen incidents and adopted a personal attitude of making sure I never stepped on the toes of anyone with such beliefs.'

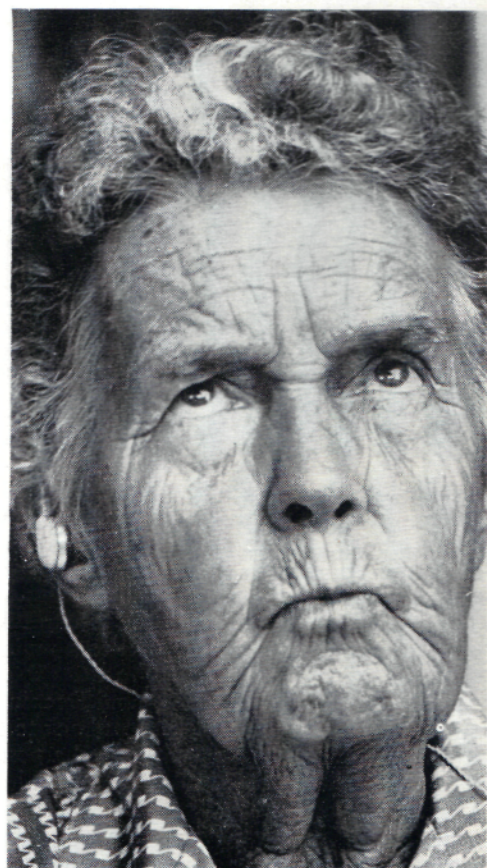
Two stories Doctor Trant related involved Americans, who, as products of modern metropolitan environments, were inclined to disregard entirely the superstitious warnings of primitive Africans.

Story number one began when a Detroit woman in a remote African village opened her door to see a python fall from the roof beams on to the step at her feet. She screamed; her husband arrived, grabbed a gun and shot the python.

The villagers were horrified. They believed that spirits of their ancestors lived in pythons and that these huge snakes should never be killed. It was all right to prod the reptile with a burning stick or use other methods to chase it away. But to kill — never.

The African staff at that home, expecting the spirits to seek revenge, stayed away from the house. But they watched — and saw the husband cut down a large tree because, he claimed,

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the birds that lived in it ate the seeds and garden produce. To the villagers that tree was sacred. Now the family would really be in trouble.

A tropical thunderstorm developed that night. Lightning struck an outbuilding and started a fire that only quick action and determination enabled them to quell before serious damage or death occurred.

The couple were satisfied that they had saved their property from the result of a freak lightning strike. The villagers were equally satisfied that the spirits had spoken.