

(By W.R.R. in the "S.M. Herald.")

Throughout Australia, wherever blacks do congregate, there exists among the tribes a strong belief in the efficacy of the "Death Bone." In North Queensland this instrument of death is invariably made from a human bone, six to eight inches long, tapering at one end to a sharp point; the other end is rounded off with a mixture of bloodwood gum and native bees' wax. The central portion coloured according to the ochres to be found in the specific "country" from which it comes, white, yellow, and red lines and rings, predominating. The method of using this deadly instrument is common to all tribes, and though there are many other ways of encompassing an enemy's death by witchcraft in vogue among the blacks, it seems to be acknowledged by them that the Death Bone is the surest and most deadly, for they believe that the evil is embodied in the thing itself, and therefore it is not necessary to "wish" or concentrate the mind upon the objective, as in other methods.

The bone is usually formed—or made—under the influence of strong incantations, and then anointed. The anointing is done secretly by one of two of the old men of the tribe, and consists of smearing it with the exudation from a human corpse in the final stages of putrefaction. In anointing, the muttered incantations are even stronger than those used in the making, and so secret that only the old men using them know their power. This ceremony over, the "bone" is ready for use, and, as there are usually many blood feuds awaiting settlement, there is no dearth of applicants for its services. The selected candidate then becomes the "pointer," and is permitted to carry the deadly thing to the vicinity of his enemy's camp after nightfall. In full view of his victim, from a short distance, he "points" the bone. Some death bones are considered more efficacious than others, and in the case of a very powerful one, it is not even necessary that the victim should see the instrument. Its reputation has probably travelled far and wide among the tribes, and the effect will be the same provided the victim "knows" or is informed that he has been "pointed." Such is the belief in its efficacy that the victim invariably sickens, and, in ninety-nine cases out of one hundred, wastes away and dies.

THE NATURAL REACTION.

Of course there is an aftermath. If the "pointer" is known to the relatives of the victim, he, on the death of the bewitched, becomes a marked man, and, sooner or later, by a spear or witchcraft meets his end. If, on the other hand, the aggressor is unknown a solemn conclave is convened of all the relatives, both blood and tribal, and the guilty one is selected. It makes little difference whether he is innocent or not. Once he is adjudged the avenger is appointed, and it is his duty, above everything else in life, to compass the death of the selected man. Should he meet his fate in his endeavour, the next in blood relationship takes on the task, and so it goes

the sorcerer exempted. Strange to say, the death of a lubra is of small account, and therefore it is of little consequence how she meets her end; but in cases where it is known that she has been the victim of open witchcraft, it is a common practice for her blood relations to form a punitive expedition, mete out justice to the offender, return to their tribe, and calmly await the reprisals which are sure to follow, probably involving the whole tribe in a set battle.