

Tembo Storm Protection Rites

(Thrice through the Dark Continent: A Record of Journeyings across Africa during the years 1913-16, J du Plessis, London, 1917)

I noticed, in one of the villages, the religious ceremonies which they perform when a storm threatens, The local priest (or his substitute) on such occasions fetches from a hut the requisite paraphernalia of magic. These consist of a little doll of wood, clothed in a monkey skin, and a calabash filled with maize pips. He brings them out into the village street, holding the calabash in his right hand and the doll in his left. Then he turns to the quarter from which the storm threatens, and vigorously shakes the calabash, which makes a deafening rattle. At the same time he raises aloft the *kuambumbu*, as the doll is named, and invokes the storm spirits. Some three or four men, armed with flutes of reed, accompany him, blowing continuously on their unmelodious instruments. Whenever the roll of thunder is heard, the priest dances about in frenzied fashion, rattles his calabash, holds aloft the doll, and shout prayers or imprecations at the approaching tempest. These ceremonies are continued until the storm is upon them and the downpour commences, when the priest withdraws into his hut, the musicians disperse, and the proceedings terminate. They have done what they could to placate the demons who dwell in the lightning and the tempest.