

## MEDICINE AMONG THE ARABS.

By E. A. FINN.



HERE had been no hospital in Jerusalem, or even in Palestine, till one was built, by the benevolence of English Christians, for relief of the distressing amount of disease which was wasting the Jewish population in the Holy City. The managers of the institution very

wisely decided, however, that it would be both Christian and wise to allow the other inhabitants of the city and surrounding villages to share, in some degree, in the blessings of medical aid. Therefore, on one day in the week, people of all classes were admitted as out-patients to receive advice and medicine according to their need. Strange were the scenes which might then be witnessed in the court-yard and in the waiting-rooms. Stately effendis, or Mohammedan grandees, followed by their pipe-bearers, came ceremoniously to consult the English "hakeem." Arab peasants waited around the door for their turn; pilgrims, in divers Oriental costumes, gave variety to the scene; and peasant-women, with children slung at their backs in a hammock or riding astride their shoulders, would wait patiently until the lords of creation had been first attended to.

As various as the applicants was the nature of their ailments. Indigestion, arising from a feast after the Ramadan fast, want of appetite from too constant smoking or coffee-drinking, were petty ills. But there were ague patients in abundance; cases of rheumatism from the practice among the peasantry of going bare-legged in all weathers; ophthalmia among the infants, because their mothers deemed it unlucky to wash their faces; also among grown-up people, either from contagion, or because they had slept under the dew at night without covering their heads, or because they had slept under a fig-tree, or eaten figs and touched their eyes with unwashed fingers, thus causing inflammation from the acrid milk that exudes from every part of the fig-tree. There were some who had only eaten about a bushel of green chick-peas at a time, and therefore had a pain at the "head of their heart" (an Arab always calls his stomach "his heart"); others had brought on ague by drinking water after eating grapes. Here was a poor, stupid-looking creature, who had almost stifled himself the night before by going to sleep with a pan of charcoal-fire at his head. There was a mother holding up a sickly infant, pale and wan, but eating, as well as it could with its first tooth or two, a green cucumber, which it grasped with both hands.

"Why do you not wash your child? It cannot be healthy thus."

"I am afraid; washing it would weaken its sight."

To one wealthy patient, no less a personage than the governor's wife (who, however, was visited in her own seraglio), the doctor recommended a warm bath for her sick infant, but was told, "Oh, no! I washed it once, some months ago; but it made it so ill that I will never wash it again."

Another mother will ask for a charm to cure her child, because an envious neighbour had looked at it and smitten it with her evil

eye—having no child of her own—and had thereby caused it to be ill all night. Here comes a man, a sturdy Arab peasant, looking woe-begone, however, and uncomfortable.

"What is the matter, Ibrahim?"

"My lord, I am ill; my heart pains me."

"How so? Hast thou taken the pills which I gave thee?"

"Verily, thy servant has swallowed them all."

"All! it was but this morning that I gave them to thee, saying, two were to be taken every morning."

"Truth, my lord; but I thought, if the pills were good, they would cure me faster if I took them all at once!"

Here comes another. "Well, Ahmed, is thy ague better?"

"Better, may God reward thee! I took the paper which my lord gave me" (the prescription to be made up at the dispensary), "and have worn it in my turban ever since, and here it is still" (taking his turban off, and extracting carefully the little slip of paper from its folds), "and it makes me quite well."

"Hast thou drunk no medicine, then?"

"Why should I, my lord? Thy paper is better than medicine, and more powerful than the charms of the Morocco sheikhs. I am quite well, now, thank God!"

Another had not, indeed, worn the paper in his turban, but he had taken the prescription and carefully washed the ink off it with water, and this water he had drunk, but his ague was not yet gone! In thus treating the prescription, he had but done with it as the Mohammedan sheikhs direct their patients to do with the charms they write for that purpose to remove disease. Another brought his son to be cured, alleging that the doctor had as yet done him no good, although he had most carefully taken the prescription, and, rolling it up, had set fire to it, and smoked the child's nostrils, and eyes, and ears with it seven times!

"And thou, O Ali (a grey-bearded old peasant), what desirest thou?"

"Nothing, O my lord! I have received the pills from thy deputy, but will my lord tell me whether I ought to put the pills into my girdle or wear them in my shoes?"

"Wear them in thy shoes! No; thou must swallow them—eat them; but not all at once, two every morning at sunrise before thy first pipe."

"Upon my head be it."

Another would come to have his hand cured. Fearing to be taken for military service he had chopped off the thumb of his left hand, and then cauterized the wound which had now become inflamed.

It may easily be imagined, that if the medicine and advice given to these Arab patients were so little understood or misapplied their own customs were curious enough. I have seen a servant stop when attending his master in the street to adjust a bandage which had slipped off a vein in his arm, opened an hour before, because it was his day for being bled—once a month as usual. I have known an infant, less than a year old, the only and dearly-loved child of most respectable parents, educated people, die from repeated bleedings in the foot intended to cure it of ague. Branding with a hot iron at the back of the neck or behind the ears is a favourite remedy for headache, and an Arab mother will have her infant branded on the

stomach to cure it of stomach-ache. For sprains, a remedy is provided by getting a bit of the clothes of all the people who caused the injury by casting an evil eye on the sufferer. These are burnt with magical incantations. A servant of my own once recommended me two cures for ague. One was cautery on the inner muscle of the little finger, as applied by a woman to a friend of his. The other was the top of the ear of a dead dog. An Arab remedy for a broken leg is to take a dog's head, split it in two and bind the halves splint-fashion round the leg till it is cured.

Let me close with two incidents from country practice. A peasant woman came to a European doctor suffering from pain in her heart. "Oh, my lord, I ate some water-melons the other night, and lay down by the threshing-floor, and a serpent came while I was asleep and jumped into my mouth, and now I hear her rumbling and tumbling in my stomach. Pray give me something to drive her out."

The doctor gave her a few drops of peppermint, and being a wag added the following advice—"Go home, lie down to sleep, but before doing so put a large piece of water-melon between your teeth in front of your mouth. Keep it open all night to entice the serpent forth and you will hear no more of her."

Another day a man came to say that his little boy of ten years old had been asleep near the spring and a crab had walked into his ear and was now growing bigger and bigger inside of his head.

"Well, what can I do for you?" asked the doctor.

"Oh, my lord, there was once a boy and he went to be apprenticed to a very clever doctor. A man was brought who had a crab in his head, and the doctor cut all round his forehead and turned back his skull and laid bare the brain, and behold there was a large crab. The doctor loosened one claw, but before he could free the other the crab would lay hold again with the first. The little apprentice was peeping through the key-hole of the door, and seeing the difficulty cried out, 'Oh, my master, when thou loosenest the claw, break it off before letting it go.' So the doctor did—he was a very clever doctor—and he cured the man. Let my lord do so for my boy—for the sake of thy beard."

"What! cut his head open?"

"Surely, if it will cure him."

"Let thy son sit down here."

The boy placed himself in a chair. The doctor applied cupping glasses to his shaven head. As the skin rose under the glasses the father declared that here were the crabs coming out of his son's head. The boy got quite well, and the father spread far and wide the fame of the doctor, saying, "I beheld him without so much as cutting the skin draw out the crabs—great big fellows out of my son's head."

A favourite remedy for gunshot wounds is to rub gunpowder well into the wound, and a cure for sword cuts is to dip the part afflicted into boiling oil. There are many other remedies in constant use among the Arabs, most of them of as much value as those described; but some really have the merit of being well adapted to ailments which they do relieve and even thoroughly cure.