

A Persian Sick-room.

A writer in the *Morning Post* gives an interesting account of the attitude of Persian pilgrims to Mecca (amongst whom his lot was cast for a while) towards medical science, a subject which, he states, gave rise to endless discussions between him and them. "Galen and Avicenna are still regarded as the leading masters of the profession, and their treatises are the only ones that are studied. Diseases are divided into hot and cold. A cold remedy is applied to a hot disease, and a hot remedy to a cold one. The doctors bleed patients suffering from malarial fever. They keep small-pox endemic by their curious remedies. Burning asses' dung is used as a fomentation in cases of inflammatory affections of the eye. Silver armlets containing texts out of the Korán are worn as preservatives of health. The evil eye is held to be the cause of every sickness, and every pilgrim gave an infallible safeguard against its effects."

The writer goes on:—"I talked with men who had never called in a physician in their lives. The saints and estekhahs had been their only doctors. 'The One who sends fever takes it away . . . Khodá rahím ast (God is merciful). . . . If He wants me to remain here He will cure me. . . . He is the best doctor.' The sick must give vent to their sufferings in moans and sighs, otherwise the malady will find its way into the intestines. Offerings in money or in sweetmeats must be given to the poor for the patient's recovery. The money is placed under the pillow every night, and is distributed every morning among the needy.

"The sick-room, as I gathered from the stories I heard, is always crowded by the members of the family, who smoke the kalyán all day long, crying out from time to time: 'Chashmé bád bétérakad! (May the evil eye burst up!)' The patient, despite the stifling atmosphere, is persuaded to believe in a speedy recovery, everybody telling him that he will soon be quite 'kushdell' or cheerful. But he knows better. When the end draws near a priest is summoned in haste. The dying man, if he has no just cause of complaint against a child or against his wife, says not a word as to the distribution of his property, having full confidence that the Divine law will be religiously followed. He instructs the priest as to the rites to be observed at his funeral and the offerings to be paid for the peace of his soul. He may ask his wife and daughters not to dishevel their hair when he is dead, and command his sons to obey their mother and to respect their sisters. If he has no issue he may settle his property on a school, a mosque, a saint, or a water cistern.

"His female relatives are now requested to leave the room. His male friends remain by his bedside till he draws his last breath. The eyes are bandaged at once with a white handkerchief, the

great toes are tied together, the hands are folded on the breast, the ears and nostrils are stuffed with cotton-wool, and the whole body is covered over with a sheet and laid out in the position in which the man died—namely, with the legs stretched towards Mecca. The corpse must not remain more than twelve hours in the house. The hammámí, or bath-keeper, now enters the house in the capacity of an undertaker. He places the body on a korsi, that is, on a raised wooden platform in the middle of the room; a copy of the Korán and a decanter of rose-water are set down near the head; and a cashmere shawl is laid over the remains. The women mourners sit all round, tearing their hair, and beating their heads with the palms of their hands, and uttering shrieks that can be heard in the neighbouring houses. Sometimes two or three priests are stationed on the platform on the roof; they announce the news of the death and the hour of the funeral.

"Meanwhile a gúr-kun is sent out to dig the grave, a few yards of white linen are purchased as a winding-sheet, and pots of halva and hundreds of loaves of bread are prepared and placed on wooden trays called khanchés."

When the funeral procession wends its way to the cemetery it is first taken to the mordeh-shur-kháné—where the dead are washed. "There the bier is laid down, and the coffin is carried into the washing place to be purified. There are special men whose duty it is to cleanse the dead from all impurities, and to cut and sew the winding-sheets. Up to this point the corpse must be regarded as unclean, and he who lays hands on it must purify himself. No needle can be used in sewing the grave-clothes, the necessary holes being made by means of a sharp wooden bodkin. After the rites of purification are over, the corpse, having been swathed in the winding-sheet, is replaced in the coffin, and is then borne on the bier to the graveside. The cast-off linen goes generally to the washerman of the mordeh-shur-kháné or to the hammámí who acted as undertaker.

"By this time everything is ready for the burial ceremony. The length of the grave must cut at right angles the line drawn in the direction of Mecca, and the body rest on the right side facing the kebleh. An unbaked brick is placed under the head, and the face, though 1 ft uncovered, is protected by a brick partition about 3 ft. above it, atop of which the earth is shovelled. Then the priest, sitting down at the head of the tomb, reads the chapter of Talghin: 'Oh, Mírzá Saleh (or whatever the man's name may be), listen and understand that God is right, that Muhammad is right,' and so forth. The prayer being over, the mourners disperse. For a month or forty days a ghari or hired priest keeps watch over the grave, praying for the soul's peace of the newly-departed, and reading the Korán aloud."

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