

Our Foreign Letter.

AN ANCIENT GREEK SANITARIUM.

Those who, interested in things pertaining to the care of the sick, travel in southern Europe and in-



quire into ancient history and legend; will find that both history and legend bring them up to the mystic name of Æscu-

lapius (as it is called in Italy) or Asclepius (as it is called in Greece). I mentioned not long ago the temple of Æsculapius, which was established on an island in the Tiber where a Roman hospital now stands, but to meet Asclepius himself one must go on to Greece, a land of many and varied enchantments. Asclepius was, according to mythology, a son of Apollo, who was the god of medicine and healing. His daughter was Hygeia, and his sign was the sacred serpent, emblem of wisdom. He was a physician and surgeon of such wonderful powers that it was said that he was finally struck by lightning and killed by Zeus (the greatest of the gods), who became jealous of the way in which Asclepius restored the dead and dying to life. He had two sons who were great surgeons, who went with the Greek army to the Trojan war as military surgeons.

Whoever goes to Constantinople and visits the Imperial Ottoman Museum will see, in the room where the relics are gathered which were excavated by Dr. Schliemann at Troy, a small collection of surgical instruments looking very much like our own—a bistoury, some forceps, a little curette with probe handle; these, no doubt, were used by the sons of Asclepius, who must undoubtedly have been a real physician, and to whom we must now return.

There were many shrines and temples erected in Greece to Asclepius, but the most interesting of all was at Epidaurus, where there was, long before the Christian era, a most complete and magnificent sanitarium, with a hospital for the sick, hotels for their friends or for patients, gymnasium, baths, gardens, temples for sacrifices and religious rites, and a beautiful "temple of Asclepius," which we, of course, may feel certain must have been the great physician's private office.

Enough of the ruins of all these buildings remain for one to judge perfectly how fine they must have been in ancient times. They were built entirely of white marble, and set on a spacious plain high above the sea and surrounded by a most beautiful circle of hills, which even yet are quite richly wooded and were probably in the ancient times thickly covered with pines—an ideal site for a sanitarium and health resort. On the side of one hill was a large

Greek theatre, still in an excellent state of preservation, and in the gymnasium, which (according to the books) was a Greek building, are the well-preserved remains of a small Roman theatre. No doubt this was built for the patients' amusement after their gymnastic exercises had been taken.

The hospital must have been beautiful. Nothing of it remains in place now but the foundations and door-sills, but by these outlines one can see that it was an enormous square, or nearly square, building, divided into small rooms, just the right size for private patients, which opened into colonnades or courts. Most interesting also are the remains of the gymnasium and the bath-houses, and of the ancient water-pipe system. In several places one can still see the water-pipes, which were made of earthenware in vase-shaped sections, one fitted into the other.

The archæologists have found many large stone slabs on which are inscribed records of the cases and their cures. From these it is quite plain that hydrotherapy was well developed, and that surgical operations were performed sometimes.

No mention of nurses can we glean from these old histories, though there is plenty about priests. But we know that where there were hydrotherapy and surgery there must have been nurses of some kind, be they called priests or what not, and one can easily imagine them, dressed in the beautiful white drapery of the Greek statues, going every morning to take their orders at the temple of Asclepius.

Many remains are seen of semi-circular marble seats, like glorified park benches, which were placed in the grounds for the patients to sit on.

In the museums are many fragments of the old buildings, pieces of columns, votive offerings given by grateful patients, statues of sick people, &c., but only one which has a distinctly medical character, this being a marble slab on which is carved a small bag which looks exactly like a surgeon's hand-bag of to-day, only rather smaller, and a scale with weights and measures. Of this slab, unfortunately, no photograph is to be found.

The trip to Epidaurus is made by carriage from Nauplia, taking an early start, six or half-past six in the morning, and returning by evening. Lunch is carried and set out by the concierge in a little summer-house on the hill beside the theatre. He provides wine, condiments, &c., and in the afternoon serves coffee and Greek confections under the trees in front of the museum. The spring is the time to go, as one then receives the most delightful impressions of what this famous old health resort must have been like to the sick who repaired to it.

The most complete collection of photographs of Epidaurus is that of the English Photograph Co., Beck's Book Store, Constitution Square, Athens. He will send English and French catalogues, and photographs may be ordered by mail.

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