

## Our Foreign Letter.

FROM SYRIA.

"May I reach  
That purest heaven, be to other souls  
The cup of strength in some great agony,  
Enkindle generous ardour, feed pure love,  
Be the sweet presence of a good diffused,  
And in diffusion ever more intense!  
So shall I join the choir invisible  
Whose music is the gladness of the world."

GEORGE ELIOT.

### MORPHINISM.

Since I last wrote to readers of "The Journal," I have, to use a Ouida-ish expression, been "up to my eyebrows" in work. The wards have been so full that in a few cases we were obliged, much against all rule and wish, to "head and tail" the children. Many of the patients were very ill, and needed constant attention, these cases being chiefly typhoid, typho-malarial, nephritis, pneumonia, a number of surgical cases, and a morphinist, for whom the eyes of Argus were required, so difficult was it to keep pace with this wily patient. One has read much of the practice of hasheesh and opium smoking in the East, but I do not think it is universally known to what extent the hypodermic injection of morphine is used by Orientals. Sometimes it is simply for toothache or some other small but trying worry, and sometimes to help them through those protracted fasts, that of Ramadan, for instance, which lasts one month, and of others, the tedium of which we Westerners have but small idea. I have been told that in Syria the practice of morphia injections was first started by a Persian quack, who learnt the custom in England. For a long time he always administered the injection himself, telling his numerous patients he had a cure for every pain. At last his clientèle became so large he taught his patients to use the syringe for themselves, and to-day it is a common occurrence to see even Mohammedan and, I believe, Jewish women sitting in a chemist's shop "trying the needles." Only the other day an instance of this sort came under my own immediate notice. I was in the town buying several things for my wards, and on entering a druggist's shop I saw, to my horror, a veiled woman sitting by the counter trying different hypodermic needles on her arm, which from shoulder to wrist bore innumerable marks of this depraved habit. I remonstrated in French with the man who was serving her. He replied, "What can I do? I detest to sell this drug, but if I refuse she will go elsewhere. The habit is formed since a long time. She wants a new needle, and is trying which suits her best. She is a Jewess married to a Moslem. Her only cure is to go into hospital!" But to return to the young Turkish soldier, the morphinist, who has been in hospital under treatment for over five months. He is nearly well now, but what a fight we have had, for although at times such a pleasant, intelligent boy, he was certainly *passé-maitre dans l'art de la ruse*. The day he was admitted he was in a most precarious state, and looked just a total wreck of a man; he was

accompanied by his mother, a widow, who was weeping bitterly at the condition of her only son; she assured us that he wasn't always like this, so ill and untidy and dirty, only since he became a soldier, and owing to the long and dreary marches in all sorts of weather, through burning heat or drenching rain, the weary trudge must be accomplished, he had suffered much from fatigue and repeated attacks of malaria, and had "lost the power to sleep." A comrade had shown him the use of this "wonderful medicine," and so he had accustomed himself to this pernicious habit, and had become a confirmed morphinist. From two to three grains a day he rapidly increased the dose, and was at the time of admission to hospital himself injecting 27 grains in 24 hours. Sometimes the needle was not withdrawn from the arm, but left in place while the piston was refilled by his devoted mother with a further dose, and re-adjusted, so that the patient was continuously under the control of this most dangerous, and in many cases, demoralising drug, while his own sense of self-control was lost. His condition can only be described as abject. Though only 22 years of age he looked much older; he was painfully thin, his face of a sallow, lustreless hue, with that hopeless, dejected expression so common in morphinists. At first the doctors thought a sudden withdrawal of this drug would be advisable in Rasheed's case, but it was found impossible, as only a few hours after admission there were signs of collapse, and so one-tenth of the accustomed dose was given, and the patient's bedside never left night or day for the first week, and for many weeks after this one and all of us had to be like sentinels on the watch, never knowing from one minute to another what might happen, for our young Turk was still in a most critical condition. At one period the diarrhoea was so excessive that the question of diet became a serious difficulty; this, however, was soothed by large injections of hot water (100 degs. to 105 degs.). The digestion was very much impaired, but this was improved by gentle massage. The case all through was one needing the most infinite patience, so many "ups" and "downs"; one day we would feel quite encouraged at Rasheed's progress, and the next at our wits' end when complete collapse would seem inevitable. This was combated by caffeine, that most useful of all drugs in cases of syncope. Every day the dose of morphia was being lessened, and the doctors hoped very soon to reduce it to water only, still the progress was very slow in spite of all that was done for the patient.

Im Rasheed came every day to see her son and often brought him a dish she had made with her own hands for his dinner; generally it was some favourite *tabiech*\* such as Rasheed's soul loved. Never shall I forget the day *Habeeb*, the faithful ward-servant, came to me and said, "Oh, lady, see what I find! No wonder Rasheed is still consumed with morphia." He held in his hands a plate of steaming hot *tabiech*, with another plate on the top of it. "Well, *Habeeb*," I replied, "what's the matter with that? Didn't Im Rasheed

\* *Tabiech*: cooked stuff, generally rice and meat, tomatoes, etc.

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