Gleanings from the Minute-Books of the Jerusalem Literary Society

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GLEANINGS FROM THE MINUTE-BOOKS OF THE
JERUSALEM LITERARY SOCIETY.

By PROF. R. A. STEWART MACALISTER, M.A., F.S.A.

(Continued from Q.S., October, 1909, p. 265.)

XIV.

At the meeting of 22nd February, 1850, R. SANDFORD, Esq., read a Paper called "Arab Sketches."

It would be much easier to describe the way in which the Arabs practice medicine and surgery than to convey to you their real views of those sciences. They are not much troubled with theory, and therefore all the information we can get from them must be by carefully observing the way in which they manage their patients

A native *Æsculapius*, for every disease which flesh is heir to, requires three things—a lancet, an iron bar, and *milh Ingliz* [purgative salts]. First of all, bleed the patient even if he be dying. When you want to relieve pain in the stomach apply the red hot iron over it in different directions—a very nice way of using this instrument is to make a hole first, and then insert it. (Paralysis may come on . . . , and then death, as I have seen ; but who can find any fault with that mode of treatment which we inherit from our fathers ?)

[A European doctor's native patient will tell him] that his wife had asked him what one pill twice a day was to do—so that he had taken all at once, and that instead of being twenty times better he felt almost dead. Nothing can get over the Arab argument "if one would benefit me, surely twenty would do so in the same proportion"

In hopeless cases they wish to be deceived. The wife of a patient of mine was once much vexed when I hinted at the possibility of dissolution

Such being a more or less common state of things can it be wondered at if some prefer a different plan, which to say the least, is much more safe for the afflicted party. For instance, how much better to allow a sheikh from the Mosque of Omar to place a book on your head, than to have every drop of blood drained out of your veins. And then, instead of using red-hot iron to your only son who is troubled with a cough, let him wear one of the vertebrae of a young camel round his neck

Many diseases [they believe] are quite uninfluenced by medicine For instance, when a child won't get well, or won't die . . . it all comes from the spirits which have possessed it. You may give it salts, burn, and bleed it, but all are useless. Nothing short of freeing it of evil demons will do it any good, and the way is . . . as follows: "Take the child as soon as you hear . . . the signal for morning prayer, to an open grave, where bones of human beings have been placed, put it in and run away; and when the devotions are over, come back and receive your child freed from its spiritual tormentors"

These hasty remarks are founded on facts, and more proofs could be brought, if any were needed, to illustrate [the low standard of medical knowledge among the people of this land] . . .

XV.

At the same meeting, Mr. FINN read a Paper on "An Embellished Sepulchre near Saida."

. . . While passing a few days in a friend's country lodge . . . near Saida . . . in one of our strolls on the hill we crawled into a sepulchral grotto, the chamber and recesses of which are stuccoed over, and then embellished with paintings of trees, birds, and flowers. There was one principal chamber, in each side of which (like the sepulchres near Jerusalem) three smaller recesses are pierced, and two in front of the entrance. These two have others proceeding further out of them. There are no [arcosolia] Stucco [has been] employed only . . . to the right and left of the principal chamber. The rock is not of firm close texture, therefore in order to get a surface tolerably level for receiving the stucco an artificial evenness had to be made with stone, broken small. The embellishment may not rank in the first class of painting, yet they exhibit considerable freedom of design in the attitudes of birds flying or perched: these are all of one sort, red and yellow, with

long tails. The trees are palm, or olive. There are also iris flowers and festoons composed of olive and vine leaves alternated, and the leaves diversified occasionally with tints of autumnal brown

XVI.

At the same meeting, E. T. ROGERS, Esq., read a Paper called "Native Charms and Cures for Illness."

An Egyptian kawass last summer was affected with violent headaches: he therefore went to or sent for his sheikh to know what was to be done. The sheikh came and said that as a cure for his headache a passage from the Koran must be read over him. The patient sat down on a stone, and the sheikh, taking his cap off, read a paper containing an extract from the Koran; then taking hold of the patient's ears in each hand, gently moved his head from right to left and from back to front, and continuing the same faster and more roughly by degrees. The head of the unfortunate sufferer was in some danger of being wrung from his shoulders. This operation being concluded the kawass rose apparently almost stupefied; his head had been violently shaken for about a quarter of an hour, but still he said he was better, and thought that he should now become quite well.

Another instance . . . occurred in Safed to my kawass there. He also had a violent headache and a very hoarse cough, and after refusing medicine which I offered to him he applied to a sheikh. The sheikh wrote on a paper an extract from the Koran, then tacking it in a piece of calico sewed it inside the patient's cap, saying that it would cure his headache in a few days. And as a cure for his cough the sheikh gave him another passage from the Koran on a paper which was cut into narrow strips, one of which the sick man was to put into a cup, and placing the same outside the house in some position that the nightly dew or rain might fall into it, there to drink off this potion as soon as the dawn appeared. This he continued for seven or eight mornings and then believed himself perfectly well.

XVII.

At the meeting of 22nd March, 1850, E. T. ROGERS, Esq., read a Paper entitled "Manufactures and Commerce of Safed."

1. *Pipe-bowl Manufacture*.—In the principal bazaar of Safed, called Sûk el-Jâmi'a, on any fine market-day there may be seen seated on a

bench in front of some unoccupied shop or stall, a Muslim of middle age wearing a green turban . . . a red jacket (the sleeves turned up to his elbows) and a long dark leather apron. He is seated in thorough Arab fashion : and on his lap is a board covered with little dabs of pale brown clay rolled up into equal sizes, perhaps rather larger than walnuts. By his side he has two cans, one containing water, the other oil. He first takes a piece of wood [which is] the ground-work or mould, on which to build the pipe-bowl. After oiling this mould he takes one of the lumps of clay, and pressing it over the head of the mould with his fingers as nearly to the required form as possible, he next uses a modelling tool resembling in size a common paper-knife. With this he shapes the clay to the form of a pipe-bowl, occasionally wetting the tool that it may work the more freely. He then proceeds to remove the clay from the mould, which is easily effected, the mould having been previously oiled.

The upper part of the bowl, thus far complete, it is now only necessary to make the stem, which is done in a similar manner to that above described, on a mould of the proper form. This done, they are joined by pressing one against the other, and while in this wet state any figures which the imagination can suggest may be drawn upon them. After being baked in an oven they are sold at a cheap rate Great numbers of these bowls are annually sent to Damascus.

2. *Oil*.—In Safed the olive oil is superior to that found in most parts of Palestine. The tree requires great cold and wet in the winter season, and great heat in the summer : such is exactly the climate of Safed. The produce of oil is therefore very great, many of the hills in the neighbourhood being almost covered with olive-groves, but it might be greater if some European ingenuity were applied to the extraction of it from the fruit. I have heard a merchant in this country remark that the refuse thrown away by the natives, after having expressed as much oil as they could with their poor machinery, would be valuable to English manufacturers who could yet obtain from it a considerable quantity of oil.

Olive oil is also carried in great quantities to Damascus. In Safed it is generally sold at about three or four piastres per *rotl*.

3. *Tobacco*.—Near Safed are two or three villages (Jish, etc.), which have long been celebrated for almost the best tobacco in Palestine. Great quantities of this article also are sent to Damascus, as well as to many parts of Palestine. Damascus, however, is the

principal place with which Safed carries on any commerce. *Tambak*, a species of tobacco only used in the *narghileh* [or water-pipe] and generally brought from Persia, has been tried in Jish, but hitherto unsuccessfully. Ordinary tobacco is sold in Safed at six to eight piastres per *roll*.

These articles—pipe-bowls, oil, and tobacco—are conveyed on mules and donkeys to their destinations in Damascus, and the same animals return to Safed generally laden with silk stuffs and other saleable cloths; also fruits of every description sweetmeats . . . and even some sugar, though the latter is more frequently brought by the Safed Jews from Beirut.

XVIII.

At the meeting of 26th April, 1850, R. SANDFORD, Esq., read a Paper, entitled "Antiquities of Custom."

[The Paper consisted of a few parallels between Biblical phrases and incidents, and some noted in modern Palestine. Most of these are now common-places, but this may be quoted—]

About two years ago a poor man was executed in the open street in Jerusalem. He was beheaded, and the people afterwards walked up to the body and dipped their feet in the blood. I have since found that it is customary for the avenger of blood when he has slain his victim to dip his feet in the blood of the slaughtered man. [Compare] "That thy foot my be dipped in the blood of thine enemies"—Psalm lxviii, 23

"It is not the custom in our country to give the younger before the elder," said an Arab friend of mine to an applicant for the hand of one of his daughters. So said Laban in Patriarchal times

[The author of the paper also described a scene he had witnessed, illustrative of Exodus xxii, 26. A creditor had taken a debtor's outer cloak as pledge, and refused to return it, notwithstanding the appeals of the debtor, and afterwards of his wife, who vainly tried to move the creditor to mercy on account of the cold of the night.]

[End of Vol. I of the Minute-books.]

(*To be continued.*)