

Arabian lithotomy.

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ARABIAN LITHOTOMY

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ARABIAN LITHOTOMY.

Dr Handyside read before the Medico-Chirurgical Society of Edinburgh, at its meeting on 6th May 1863, the following extract of a letter from Mr P. K. Vartan, L.R.C.S. Ed., formerly a pupil of the Medical-Missionary Society of Edinburgh, and now settled in practice at Nazareth:—

“Some time since I heard of an Arab who was said to be a clever lithotomist: none like him, the only man who knew the art, or who could detect the presence of a calculus! Though anxious to see one who doubtless had himself propagated such an absurd notion among this people, it was only lately that I had that opportunity. I heard some weeks ago that this Arab had under his charge a man suffering from *stone*, who had endured this agony for upwards of six years, and that, after many native doctors had failed, this Arab at last had succeeded in discovering the existence of the disease. The patient had come to him from a distance, and had been cut by him four days previously; but, after manipulating about an hour, and of course tormenting the poor creature to the highest degree, he could not succeed in removing the stone. On the third day after, he had repeated the process during the same length of time, but without success. The day following that, the wife of the poor sufferer came to my house, weeping, and prayed me to go and anæsthetize her husband on the next day, when she expected the Arab would return and resume his endeavours to extract the stone. Had I been possessed of a pair of lithotomy forceps I would have gone and extracted the stone, rather than be the mere agent to administer chloroform whilst a rude Arab was ploughing with his fingers in this poor man's body. As it was, however, I promised, for the sake of humanity, to do as the poor woman wished.

“Next day, accordingly, I went to the house to meet the Arab; and, finding the patient a fit subject for the administration of chloroform, I awaited the arrival of the operator, examining meanwhile, the case of instruments that he had left behind him at his previous visit. These were:—a pair of curved scissors; a pair of small, straight bone-forceps; a pair of small, straight bone-forceps, one blade broken; a wretched pair of tooth-forceps; a pair of a smith's or tinker's forceps; an instrument something like a compass; two old lancets, fixed at the joints by thread; a piece of wire; an old pair of dissecting forceps; a small broken file; a broad lancet; a straight grooved director; a useless piece of iron. The lithotomist came at last; and to my interrogation he answered, that he would finish his work at this time in a quarter of an hour. He commenced; but could not finish in one hour. I began then to withdraw the chloroform; but the wife of the poor patient entreated me to continue it by little and little till nearly two hours had elapsed, when I could no longer, with propriety, listen to her entreaties to continue it. The operator was also obliged to discontinue his efforts. No wonder that he could not extract the stone, for it was very large, and the man had nothing but his fingers to work with, and none of the instruments that you use in the operation of lithotomy.

“In examining a case of stone his sound is his right forefinger, which he introduces into the rectum to feel if there is any hard movable body in the bladder. To facilitate this procedure he presses the hypogastric region of the patient with his left fist, as hard as he can. After he is sure there is a stone he gets

four or five men to his assistance. He cuts into the "raphé perinei" with one of the old lancets above mentioned, bit by bit, till he opens the bladder; then he introduces the forefinger of one hand into the rectum (whilst a robust man is pressing the hypogastric region with his two fists very hard) and brings the stone to the margin of the wound, and rolls it out, if it is small enough; but in the above case it was too large. In spite of three unsuccessful trials, the stupid fellow had told the patient and his friends that after seven days (after the third trial) it would fall out by itself. I thought that the poor man would surely die before the seven days, if the stone remained in him; but if it were removed, perhaps he might live. I therefore, the same night, *made* a pair of forceps to extract the stone on the following day, and resolved to attend him, and so to give him a chance. But the wife had a strong faith that the stone would after seven days fall out by itself, and she declined to permit me to interfere. In vain I endeavoured to persuade her. The next day she came to ask me to do whatever I thought best; but my services were useless then, for the man was sinking, and the same evening he died. As soon as I heard that he was dead I went to the house, and with some difficulty got permission to extract the stone, which in two minutes' time I did, though the body was rigid. The people were surprised that I succeeded in removing, in such a short time, what the Arab could not remove after three long trials. They were now convinced that the doctors in England are not ignorant of this art, but are rather more clever than this famous Arab. The measurements of the stone are 3 inches in length, 2 inches in breadth, $1\frac{3}{4}$ inch thick. The weight of it is about 4 oz. Not having reagents, I do not know of what it consists. I should like to send it to you, if you think it may be of use to you, or to the museum of the College of Surgeons.

"As regards the after-treatment, the Arab proceeds in the following empirical manner:—As soon as he removes the stone (if he succeeds) he applies to the wound a young pigeon, cutting its head and legs off, opening its body, and laying its warm viscera next the wound. After about two hours he applies an electuary of salt, honey, and two astringent substances, twice daily, for about three days. After that he makes a second application of the electuary, which he leaves till the wound heals. He forsakes his patient, indeed, after the second day; and whether he lives or dies does not concern him at all,—this operator thinking that whenever the stone is removed his responsibility is at an end."



