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24.9.10.

LETTERS OF ASSYRIAN PHYSICIANS.

The letters of arad-Nans () the physician at the court of Assurbanipal have long been known to us, and many attempts at translation have been made by Professor Sayce, Dr. C. Johnston, Pr. Martin and others, but none have been successful. Now that Prof. Robert Harper has published the text of a number of his letters we are able for the first time to gain a true knowledge of their contants.

The first letter is tablet No.S.1064, of the British Museum Collection and reads as follows:-

"To the King my lord,
Thy servant Arad Mana (says)
May there be exceeding peace to the King my lord.
May Minip and Sula give joy of heart
And health of body to the King my lord.
It is (now) exceeding well with the poor (feeble) man whose eyes are diseased.
I had applied a dressing to his face,
Yesterday evening I undid the bandage which held it
and removed the dressing,
There was matter on the dressing,
As much as the head (tip) of a little finger.
Thy gods whom among them it be
Has put his hand in this affair.
He (those god) has spoken the word.
It is extremely well.
Let the heart of the King my lord rejoice.
In about (adu) seven or eight days he will be well."

Here it is to be noted that the writer begins his letter with an invocation to Ninip and Gula, the patron divinities of the medical profession.

The next letter is K.519 of the British Museum Collection. The writer Arad Mana, salutes the King in the usual terms and associates his son with him. The medical portion reads:-

*For the treatment we carried out we were given 5/6 of a shekel.

The day he came he was much essed,
He recovered his strength, he stayed until
In regard to the sick man, who had blood running from his nose,

The messenger (the Rab Mag) has told me,
Yesterday at evening much blood ran,
The dressings were unskilful, h
They had been placed on the breating parts of the nose,
and impeded the breathing and come off because of the flow
of blood.
Let them be placed within the nostrils(plugging), they will
preserve the breathing and the blood will be held back.
If in the eyes of the King in the morning I will come and
attend to him,
Let me hear as to his condition (submu = health)."

The next letter, K.83.1.18.2, relates to the sickness of the King himself, and after the usual salutations the writer says:-

"Constantly (Kaivanu) has the King my lord said to me in this manner "The establishment (nature) of my sickness is this, thou hast not seen to its
nature, its removal thou hast not effected." In former time I myself spake
thus - "The ulcer is not to be removed (curable). I cannot know (understand)
it." Now however I sealed a letter and send it. In the presence of the
King let it be read. For the King my lord I will prescribe (teach). If
in the eyes (face) of the King my lord it is favourable, let the seer (barū)
do his treatment. Let the King apply the lotion. The sore will be loosed.
The dressing of oils let the King apply it two or three times."

In another case the King attends to a young prince, Assur-zukin-palaeya, the brother of Assurbanipal, who is suffering from an abcess under a tooth. He says he "has lifted the head of the tooth," and no doubt lanced the abcess and that the pain has ceased.

After the same salutations as in the former letter the writer says:-

"In regard to the abcess of the tooth in which the King sent to me.

I caused him to raise up his head.
The abcess of the tooth is serious
In regard to which the King sent to me.
And thou thyself art anxious in respect of it.
He is pale of face.
I myself examined the face of Assur-mukin-paleya,
For the satisfaction of the King.
And to the King I am now coming.
Thus that for the King my lord.
During the month and during the days.
I may perform the necessary ceremonies."

Both these letters show that the physician was closely associated with the seer or baru, and indeed in the roll of precedents of the Assyrian court, the Asu is classed with the Baru or Seer and the Abba or Astrologer. When the medical man failed, recourse was had to the magician. This association is no doubt a survival of the times when the Asipu, or "witch doctor" was consulted in case of illness, which in most ancient times was regarded as a species of demoniacal possession. The medical men in Assyria and Babylonia like most trades and professions in the East, formed a guild with the Asu rabu or chief physician at the head, and frequently on occasions of trouble a council of consultation (adu) was held, at which toth physicians, magicians and wise men (abba) met. One such consultation took place at Assur in the reign of Esarhaddon, when the abbas or "sages" of Nineveh, Kakzi, and Arbila, we are told in Tablet 83.1.18.9, British Museum, entered into agreement and consultation. These consultations usually took place at night and under "the face of the starry Heaven." Thus the tablet says, "They enter in consultation on the night of the 15th day (curiously the Sabbath day) in the face of the stars they appoint it." Another text, K.572, states that the 16th of Nisam there was a general consultation, probably annually held at the palace, when the scribes, physicians, the Seers (bari), the Mecromancers (Mas.Mas), the seers who observed birds (dagil izzuri) assembled. This text shows that certain medical men more or less attached to the person of the King, lived in the palace.

This seems confirmed by a letter from the prince Samas-mitu-uballit, who was the son of Esarhaddon, and therefore the younger brother of Assurbanipal, who writes asking that a physician may be sent to visit a sick lady. It reads:- "To the King my lord thy servant Samas-mitu-uballit (the Sun-god who raises the dead). Verily peace to the Ling my lord. May Nebo and Marduk be continually gracious to the King my lord. Verily the hand-maid (amat) of the King my lord, Bau Gamilat, is extremely ill. She can eat nothing. Therefore let the King my lord give an order that a physician

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(asu) come and see her."

In the famous letter of Kudurru we have a record of a doctor having been sent by the King.

The association between the doctor and the magician was so close that the former had to consult the latter as to the day being one favourable for the attempted cure of a patient. Thus we find that certain are said to be such "that the doctor touches not the sick with his hand." A similar belief is found in Hippocrates and in the hemerologies of the Babylonians we find the 7th, 14th, 21st, 28th, and 19th days are days on which it was unfortunate to take medicine (asu) for the body.

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The letters of arad. Nana (125 00 to 68 68 84)

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