

A PEEP INTO THE UNKNOWN.

I HAD shortly left my training school after five very happy years, and was doing a few weeks private nursing before going to England for further training. Cases were not very numerous, and I had been idle about four days when a call came at noon one day, in the form of a note, from a nurse I had met at a former case. From it I learnt it was a case of enteric, or cases I should say, as a Mahomedan father and daughter, living in the City, were both ill. Much advice was proffered me to refuse the case owing to the locality, but as I had determined not to refuse any case without excellent reasons, I insisted on taking this up. So 8 p.m. beheld me ready for the night's duty, but I felt somewhat dubious when a shigram arrived, and a Mahomedan man asked for me. In I got, and the man occupying the seat opposite, plied me with searching and personal questions *en route*. These I did my best to parry with politeness, and what I hoped was dignity, but which hardly created any impression on my guide.

From the broader streets into the narrow dark lanes of the Indian quarter we sped on still into dark and dingy ways, with tall houses seeming to meet above our heads. We stop at one, and the man lights me up a steep dark, and dirty staircase by striking matches; the feeble intermittent sparks only accentuating the gloom. In a small ante-room several men meet me with unabashed stares, and I am led into a second room wherein are seated the ladies of the family in a circle on the floor. Before them lies a large brass tray, on which in small China saucers, reposes the evening meal of various spicy hot dainties; small dainty fingers dart quickly from one to another selecting choice morsels. My entrance is received with stares, smiles, and "salaams", and I am invited to join them, but plead that I have already dined.

On into my patient's room which runs the length of the house, and overlooks the street, and along that side has several windows, but one securely closed. Along the opposite wall are tall glass cupboards, containing a heterogeneous and hideous collection of glass, china and silver, evidently "made in Germany." In the centre of the room a round wooden table contains the medicines and report book, and to one side the milk lies on a smaller table. There are in the room four wooden beds hung with heavy muslin curtains, which effectually screen the occupants and exclude all air. On one lies my patient, a strong looking bearded man of 40; the other beds accommodate a sister-in-law and baby, with an ayah on the floor beside it, a son of 16 who is just convalescing from enteric, a daughter of

is also convalescent, and whose bed is shared by a woman servant. The wife of my patient sleeps on the floor with another sister-in-law. A man servant sits just within the door, making, with me, a total of 11 souls in that small room! The room is hung with several chandeliers swathed in red Turkey twill, but in one a small wick floating in oil sheds an obscure light.

In a small room off this larger one is the second patient, a girl of seven. Squatting on her bed, laughing, chatting, chewing betel nut and massaging her by turns, are three women servants. I ask the day nurse to show me the sanitary arrangements, only to find they are non-existent, and that no disinfectant is being used for linen, excreta, or drains! The hour or two before midnight is unpleasantly enlivened by visits from various males of the family who put me through the usual searching personal catechism; also a visit from the *Hakim*, or Doctor, who seems to regard me with distrust and suspicion.

After midnight, the family retire to rest. The monotony of my dark and miserable night's duty is broken by the endless street cries chiefly the beggar's wail, and the unceasing attentions of several bold large rats to the milk. I am ashamed to say I received the first rat with a scream. My unlucky self is now an object of interest to mosquitoes, and other invisible animals, added to which the heat makes the night intolerable. The women servants with the little girl patient jabber all night, and I can with difficulty control them. My patient requires frequent but trivial attention.

At length the day dawns and the family awake. The wife is a kind and gentle woman who seems much attached to her husband, and is solicitous also over my wants. She offers me a cup of tea and biscuits, and I have to explain tactfully that it is a peculiarity of mine to touch no food till I return home for breakfast. When the day nurse at length relieves me, I withdraw from the case. I know the nurse for a woman of common sense and capability of a sort, but she is not a fully trained nurse, and so I see no hope of altering the circumstances. I was received back with the annoying, "I told you so," and eat humble pie, and yet the experience was one I was not sorry to have had. It convinced me much was done in the name of "trained nursing" which we should like to repudiate.

L. E. M.

"Please, Teacher, Mother says can Albert David sit by 'isself this mornin' 'cos 'e 's got a touch o' the Measles?"—*Punch*.
