

Doctors in Old Egypt

Medicine

ALEXANDRE MORET in *The Nile and Egyptian Civilization* (Knopf):

Medicine, then, was intimately bound up with religious beliefs and magical arts. . . .

Remedies are often accompanied by incantations, allusions to some deity—Isis, Thoth, Horus, Ra, Anubis, Imhetep, Amon-Ra—who was cured by the same prescription, and will come to the aid of the physician. To speak these spells “in the right voice” made a cure fairly certain.

Luckily for the reputation of the Egyptian physician, a papyrus has recently been analysed which reveals a more scientific spirit. The Edwin Smith Papyrus discusses surgical cases, classifying them in order, from the head downwards, in a methodical manner very different from the fanciful exposition of the medical papyrii. In the portion preserved there are ten observations for the head, four for the nose, three for the jaws, five for the temporal region, five for the ear, lips, and chin, six for the throat and cervical vertebrae, five for the clavicular and scapular region, nine for the thorax and breasts, and one for the backbone; the rest is missing. Each case is set forth methodically. The complete exposition of a case comprises: 1, Statement—Remedies for a given case; 2, Observation—If you examine a case presenting so-and-so; 3, Diagnosis—Say of it, “It is such-and-such a malady”; 4, Prognosis—If it is mild, say, “It is a malady which I can treat”; if it is doubtful, “It is a malady which I can combat”; if it is incurable, “It is a malady for which I can do nothing”; 5, Treatment—For a wound in the temple, “Apply fresh meat the first day; then treat with an ointment and honey until healed.”

In only one case out of forty-eight, is a magical charm added to the treatment. . . .

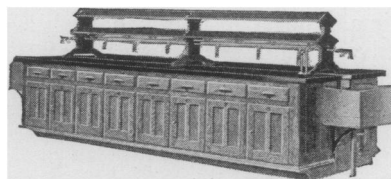
We need not be surprised that Herodotus proclaims the triumph of medicine in the country. In Egypt, he says, medicine is specialized, like oracles. “Each physician deals with one malady, not more. And the whole place is full of physicians. Some are established as healers of the eyes, others of the head, others of the teeth, others of the region of the belly, and others of internal complaints.” Now, this specialization, which, after all, proves a scientific method, was very ancient; in the Old Kingdom, Pharaoh had physicians “for his two eyes.”

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Bees—Concluded

probably prove to be more numerous. Only 500 species, or five per cent., are social, that is, live in organized communities. The remainder are solitary forms of many families some of which are very large and widely distributed. In this huge group the honey bee stands in much the same relation to the other members of the family as man does to the other animals, a fact that has to a certain extent obscured a real knowledge and understanding of the honey bee itself. Much fable, superstition and sentiment have clouded over the accurate observations necessary for the clear understanding of this valuable and highly interesting insect.

Entomologically speaking, the bees are considered merely as a group of wasps which have forsaken a carnivorous diet of caterpillars, grubs, spiders, etc., and turned vegetarian, subsisting entirely on pollen and honey. One specialist in this group of insects has designated them as “flower wasps” while many German entomologists refer to them as “Blumenwespen.”

The long and intimate association with flowers has left its stamp on all the organs and habits of the bees, while botanists believe that a great many flowers have been modified in structure, arrangement and color in adaptation to the bees for the purpose of cross pollination.

The solitary bees and those social bees with less complex systems of living than the honey bee have a much more ruthless, less intricate way of insuring the survival of their species over the cold months. Among the social wasps and the bumble bees the whole colony dies at the onset of cold weather with the exception of a few hardy young queens that have appeared in the brood late in the fall. These hide themselves away in cracks or other protected places and after emerging in the spring, lay eggs and tend the young larvae until they are old enough to collect honey and otherwise survive her majesty, who now concentrates exclusively on the serious business of egg laying. From such a simple form of communism have the honey bees evolved by some mysterious process their highly organized and perfected method of survival.

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None of the many schemes to dispel fog artificially has proved commercially practical.