

INCIDENTS IN DISPENSARY WORK.

MARION WELLS THOMS, M. D.

There are no doubt many incidents in our daily work that would be of great interest to friends at home if we were always thoughtful enough to keep them in mind. Many things, however, that seemed strange to us at first, have now become so commonplace that we cease to think of them as of interest to others.

The customs of the people are filled with superstitions which are always cropping out but which they seem loth to explain if they themselves know the origin. At least one can't get a satisfactory answer as to why these things are believed. One morning a new patient said that her sister had sent for a small piece of one of my dresses. I asked what she wanted of it and she said her sister was not well and thought a piece of something I had worn would make a good charm. I told her I didn't treat people that way but if her sister would come I would give her medicine. She seemed quite disappointed to think I should refuse to grant such a simple request and evidently had little confidence in my judgment for she never came again.

An old woman not long ago asked me for a "morsel of rice" for her daughter who was not sick but suffering from sorrow. Her husband who had formerly been good to her had now divorced her and taken another wife. On finding, they had rice at home but for some superstitious reason wanted some from our kitchen I tried to comfort them with a Gospel passage instead of with the rice.

To us to whom our eyesight is so precious it seems strange that people for a day neglect sore eyes when it is possible to receive treatment, yet patients are constantly coming after their disease has become incurable. One woman whom I am now treating says that her eyes became very sore and painful and she asked to be taken to the doctor. Her people went to the imam—the man who leads in prayers at the mosque and is a sort of religious advisor—and asked if they should take her. He told them not to and probably gave her treatment on his own account either by reading some portion of the Koran over her or writing out a passage for her to use as a charm. Needless to say she didn't im-

prove and after a time was taken to a man from India who calls himself a doctor but has no recognized qualifications. He told her to go home and apply a native concoction which she did without any benefit. Finally, when one eye was hopelessly destroyed and the other nearly so, she came here and has been coming for weeks though nothing much is done for her except to keep the very small pupil dilated a little to let in more light. She seems grateful for the little benefit she receives and listens quite intelligently to our talks and Scripture reading.

One day a woman came from a town several miles away after all the other patients had gone. Dr. Thoms called me and I went down to see her, but when she found herself in the room alone with me she turned and fled. I followed her to the door and asked her why she ran away. She asked me where the woman doctor was. I told her I was she. She became very apologetic then and said she had never seen a foreign woman before and from my white dress and helmet she thought I must be a man. (The Arab men and boys wear white. The women always wear some color.) She was extremely friendly and called me "Miriam," having heard the doctor call me by name, all the time she talked with me.

A great many people here suffer from a disease of the eyelids called "trichiasis" which is commonly known at home as "wild hairs." We often perform a slight operation upon such patients to relieve the suffering which is sometimes intense. One afternoon while we were operating upon a woman a friend of hers who stood by and noticed that she did not flinch nor cry out as the doctor passed the stitches through the wound he had made in the lid, asked if it did not pain her. It must have hurt a good deal, but she only replied "My father was a soldier." The women are so often afraid and have to be coaxed to submit to any little thing that is unusual, it indeed they do not altogether refuse to have it done, that this manifestation of spirit and bravery was quite refreshing.

NOTES.

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Even before leaving quarantine, Jan. 27th, I was approached by those needing medical and surgical aid. The same desire and request has not ceased to this date, May 8th, 1902.



CARRYING A PATIENT TO THE DOCTOR.

The work has been serious and frivolous. Serious that some patients have succumbed to their diseases as pneumonia, and frivolous that others have come to have an imaginary evil spirit exercised.

Perhaps the following will give an insight into part of our work. While treating patients one morning a porter came with a