CASE NOTES

LEECH-BITE OF THE CORNEA

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THE following case of leech-bite of the cornea is thought to be of interest, in that a survey of the available literature reveals no similar case.

Case Report

An Arab woman aged 25 attended the eye clinic during a routine visit to an UNNRA Palestine refugee camp in the hills of Judaea, to the north of Jerusalem, in September, 1956. She complained of severe pain in the right eye since washing her face in her cupped hands, with water from a nearby hillside spring, early that morning.

Examination.—A brown fleshy mass was observed lying eccentric on the right cornea, very closely simulating a prolapse of uveal tissue. Closer examination revealed this to be a leech (*'Alaqat'*), with its sucker adherent to the cornea and its mouth to the limbus (Figure). The eye was markedly injected and obviously painful.

FIGURE.—Right eye showing leech adherent to cornea and limbus.
Marked trachomatous vessels are present in the upper cornea.

Attempts had been made to remove the leech with forceps, and the instillation of 1 per cent. pantocaine had no effect on the parasite. However, irrigation of the eye with hypertonic saline (approx. 5 per cent.) resulted in the immediate separation of the parasite, which, although reduced in size, did not appear to regurgitate any fluid.

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Two large staining areas were present on the cornea and accordingly the eye was padded after the application of chloramphenicol ointment.

Subsequent progress was uneventful. When the patient was examined 3 days later the epithelium was intact and the only residuum was a faint nebula.

Discussion

Although the occurrence of leech-bites of the eyes may be unremarkable in tropical countries under jungle conditions associated with heat and moisture, (Duke-Elder, 1952), the presence of these parasites in the barren and arid hills of Judaea comes as somewhat of a surprise. Moreover, Manson-Bahr (1945) reports the occurrence of the horse leech (*Limnatus nilotica*) in springs and wells in the south of Europe and in the Middle East. A tentative identification of the specimen found in this case with this species has in fact been made. A survey of hillside springs in the area used by the population disclosed numerous other specimens in the crevices of the rock and it appears that cases of infestation of the mouth and throat of the many people who use these sources of water, owing to the sometimes severe shortage of other supplies, are not uncommon.

However the present case appeared to have been the first of its type noted in this area and possibly in Jordan, as the records of the Ophthalmic Hospital in Jerusalem disclose nothing similar.

It is tempting to speculate on the stimulus which caused the parasite to retain its hold on an avascular area, and to wonder what might be the effect of using leeches in corneal disease where oedematous changes are present.

REFERENCES

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