

extract from their Syriac sources; and at length to write works of their own. And thus arose vast libraries, such as that of Cordova, which contained 250,000 volumes.

The Nestorians are stated¹⁶ to have first established among the Arabs those collections of medicinal substances (*Apothecæ*), from which our term *Apothecary* is taken; and to have written books (*Dispensatoria*) containing systematic instructions for the employment of these medicaments; a word which long continued to be implied in the same sense, and which we also retain, though in a modified application (*Dispensary*).

The directors of these collections were supposed to be intimately acquainted with plants; and yet, in truth, the knowledge of plants owed but little to them; for the Arabic Dioscorides was the source and standard of their knowledge. The flourishing commerce of the Arabians, their numerous and distant journeys, made them, no doubt, practically acquainted with the productions of lands unknown to the Greeks and Romans. Their Nestorian teachers had established Christianity even as far as China and Malabar; and their travellers mention¹⁷ the camphor of Sumatra, the aloe-wood of Socotra near Java, the tea of China. But they never learned the art of converting their practical into speculative knowledge. They treat of plants only in so far as their use in medicine is concerned,¹⁸ and followed Dioscorides in the description, and even in the order of the plants, except when they arrange them according to the Arabic alphabet. With little clearness of view, they often mistake what they read:¹⁹ thus when Dioscorides says that *ligusticon* grows on the *Apennine*, a mountain not far from the *Alps*; Avicenna, misled by a resemblance of the Arabic letters, quotes him as saying that the plant grows on *Akabis*, a mountain near *Egypt*.

It is of little use to enumerate such writers. One of the most noted of them was Mesuë, physician of the Calif of Kahirah. His work, which was translated into Latin at a later period, was entitled, *On Simple Medicines*; a title which was common to many medical treatises, from the time of Galen in the second century. Indeed, of this opposition of *simple* and *compound* medicines, we still have traces in our language:

¹⁶ Sprengel, i. 205.

¹⁸ *Ib.* i. 207.

¹⁷ Sprengel, i. 206.

¹⁹ *Ib.* i. 211.