

The Hospital World.

A SAILORS' HOSPITAL ABROAD.

By A NURSE.

"By sea or by soil man is bound to toil,
And the dreamer, waiting for time and tide,
For awhile may shirk his share of the work,
But he grows with his dream dissatisfied."

It stands high up on a hill, overlooking the blue waters of a foreign port. Nothing could be more picturesque than the surroundings, and visitors coming to see the dainty little hospital are always full of admiration of the site. "Wherever the English settle they build a church," say the Germans; and we may add that after a church they generally proceed to build a hospital. It was natural that the English residents in this busy shipping place should take an interest in the many seamen landing from British vessels; and when it was found that British sailors discharged ill or injured through accidents were forlorn and homesick in the foreign government hospitals, an attempt was made to build and equip a little English hospital, staffed by English nurses, for the special care of British subjects. The result is the pretty little building standing in the midst of palms and a veritable paradise of flowers, where the convalescents can bask in a sunshine unknown in their island home.

The patients are of all sorts. Not "Jack Tars" in sailor suits from Her Majesty's gunboats, but mostly men from trading vessels, engineers, seamen, firemen, with occasionally a steward or a doctor. They are not always English—some are German or Scandinavian, being, however, for the time being, British subjects while on our ships. Their dispositions and histories are as varied as their occupations. As is the case with most patients, while they are really ill they are as good as can be and grateful for the care and attention shown them; but as soon as they are convalescent and able to get up, they often grow restless and feel they are imprisoned. Many of the firemen are the roughest type of man, heavy drinkers and accustomed to use foul language, and it is these men who sometimes give trouble and necessitate an appeal to the British Consul. I remember an instance last winter when two big rough convalescents put their hats on and vowed they would go out, swearing at the nurse when she remonstrated. They wanted to get drink and, of course, could not obtain it in the hospital. The Consul—who at the time was ill in bed—was most indignant and sent his subordinate to tell the men that if they did not behave, he would have them put under arrest! On another occasion a surly Norwegian sailor slipped out of

the door at dusk and got nearly as far as the garden gate, but, fortunately, the gardener was too quick for him and locked the great gates just in time to prevent his escape. On the other hand, however, the men are sometimes so happy that they are most reluctant to go. I remember an English sailor with fractured humerus who was perfectly contented to wander round the garden all day; he was an elderly man, very quiet and well conducted, not able to read or write, but never seeming dull; when a homeward bound steamer came into port and he was told he had to go, he positively shed tears of regret, for he had no home to go to and would have liked to stay where he was until able to work again. Some of the patients are merry and cheerful, and most are great readers of the *Tit-Bits* class of literature. They are great smokers, too, and are generally ready to put up with what few restrictions there are, provided the tobacco is not cut off.

The diseases are, of course, as varied as the men. We get malaria and dysentery in patients coming from hot countries; enteric, of course, and sometimes small-pox. Pneumonia and bronchitis, too, are not uncommon, but the greater number of cases are surgical, caused by accidents on board ship. "Crushed fingers" occurs repeatedly in the case book, and many of these apparently minor injuries are long and tedious in healing, especially when, as is generally the case, the accident occurred some days before admission and had had no doctor's care. Sometimes more tragic cases are admitted, as one day last Spring when a man lying asleep in his bunk was murderously stabbed all over the face and head by a mate who owed him a grudge. Cases of this sort come under the Consul's jurisdiction: the victim's depositions are taken in the hospital in the presence of witnesses, and a Court is held on board the ship, the assailant being then sent home to be dealt with by the Board of Trade.

There is thus constant variety to be found in a sailors' hospital, and constant interest. These men who "go down to the sea in ships and occupy their business in great waters" are the men who help to build up England's greatness and to maintain her supremacy on the sea just as much as the "Tommies" and the "Jack Tars," for whom a grateful country is just now preparing a welcome enthusiastic beyond all precedent. These common seamen are not recognised as heroes, but there are many of them who live as hard a life and perform deeds as courageous and heroic as the soldiers and sailors in our wars; they are "sick and wounded," too, in the service of their country, and we are proud to nurse them though they are not dressed in khaki or blue serge.

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