Our Foreign Letter.

FROM OPORTO.

THE "LITTLE SISTERS" IN OPORTO.

Yesterday, two of the "Little Sisters of the Poor" came to the house for odds and ends, and a very queer collection they received, consisting of candle ends, rags, illustrated magazines, coffee grounds, tea leaves, etc. One of the sisters was English, the other French. I had a long talk with the English one; she so seldom has a chance of speaking her own language, that she speaks it as though to her it were a foreign tongue.

I asked her what she did with such a weird collection.

"Oh, we make use of everything," she answered. "If you will come and see us I will show you. You know, we have nearly a hundred old people, and we are very poor. This coffee, you see, is not ground very finely, so we grind it again, and with sugar it makes a warm drink. It is such a good thing to be able to give them a warm drink, because they are so old, and have so little warmth of their own. We burn these candle ends in our lanterns, and sometimes use them for night-lights; surrounded with salt one little bit will last for hours."

"But, surely," I said, "tea cannot be good when used twice over!"

"It does not seem to hurt them, and they like it; we could not buy tea for them, it is so very dear here, not like in England. You will come and see us?"

I promised I would, so this afternoon I went, armed with the description of the Sisterhood, and the name of the place I was to tram to (Pin-a-romance). On receiving my ticket from the tram conductor I thanked him, whereat he talked to me volubly, but whether about the "thank you," which he may not have understood, or if he was merely being civil and telling me it was a fine day I had not the least idea. So I smiled, and he talked on, until at last it dawned on him that I was not capable of understanding Portuguese, and with a pitying smile he passed on.

I found the Sisterhood easily—much to my astonishment—and was admitted by a veritable Methuselah of a doorkeeper. I told him that it was a beautiful day and that it was very hot for December, of which speech he understood nothing, but being a civil man he talked rapidly in Portuguese as we went up the path to the building. There I was met by two sisters, who acted as my guides. The place reminded me in many respects of a hospital.

We went first to the kitchen and larder. In the latter place was a large basket of fresh sardines—a present. The sardines here are very fine, though large, as large as small herrings. They also had in the larder great quantities of bread; some they had bought, some had been given to them. When they have a lot of dry bread it is put into a slicing machine which cuts it into very thin slices, and then it goes into the soup. The poor here live principally on soup, rice, dried cod, oil and wine. The soup is mostly cabbage soup, and is very good when you get used to it. I am told that the oil is very much adulterated and the wine is coarse. They also have a small bean which is rather like a haricot bean; but smaller and more delicate in flavour.

Everything about the kitchen and larder was very clean, beautifully so, but beans, flour, bread, cabbage and fish appeared to be all they possessed, besides a couple of jars containing coffee-grounds and tea-leaves. They may have had more food, but I did not see any.

We then went to the old men's day room, which contained long tables, forms, and one or two chairs, and was very clean and very bare. Most of the men were sitting out in the sun, which was decidedly hot just then, for they have no fires; except the kitchen range there is no fire-place in the building. But I believe that is no hardship, for no one has a fire here except for cooking. Next we went to the women's sitting-room, which was much the same as the men's, only most of the women were in, sewing. One old dear of ninety-two was mending a vest which had been given to the Sisters who go round to collect from the charitable. One was making a three-cornered shawl out of patterns of woollen material all sewn together; one was pulling a woollen antimacassar to pieces, the wool from which was to be knitted into another three-cornered shawl. Some were too old to work, but they all looked happy and well-cared for. I noticed that many had had small-pox, and learned that the native takes small-pox as a necessity, but for years has considered consumption as very catching; and anyone suffering from it has separate utensils for eating and drinking and a separate chair, all of which are burnt when the invalid dies. As much care as possible is taken to prevent consumption from spreading, except that the patient may expectorate everywhere, but then that seems to be a necessity to the Portuguese. Men, women, and children, are everlastingly clearing their throats and spitting all over the place, even though the majority of the poor always go barefooted. Needless to say, consumption is very prevalent here.

But with smallpox no precautions whatever are taken, though I was told they are improving now, and a tram conductor need not admit anyone suffering with the disease, and that is a great deal, for trams are almost the only means of locomotion here. My guide told me that when she was a girl (she is now thirty-eight), she often met people in the streets with smallpox sores not healed, and when babies died of it they were dressed up and taken through the streets to excite the pity of passers-by. This is not allowed now.

The bedrooms, each containing from twelve to

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