

The Hospital World.

THE BRITISH HOSPITAL IN OPORTO.

No one can understand the misery of being ill in a foreign land, amongst strange people, unless they have experienced it. A friend of mine was once put ashore at a foreign port with typhoid fever, as his ship carried no doctor. I will not mention the name of the town for fear anyone belonging to the hospital there should read this, for they were very kind to him. The only trouble was that they did not believe in washing, and, as he remarked, his skin fairly cried out for water. To continue in his own words:

"One morning I watched until everyone had gone to pray—for you must know they were very good people, and did a sight of praying—then I got out of bed, and ran for all I was worth to the bath room. I found it after a little hunting, and it was a jolly, big bath, all beautifully polished. They seldom used it, and I don't wonder; it must have taken the best part of three hours to polish. Never in my life have I known anything so delicious as lying in that bath, and feeling the cold water creep up higher and higher. It was so soothing that I went to sleep, and when I woke up I was in bed, and the doctor was explaining in his best French (he did not know very much French, I knew less, and he knew no English) that if I had another bath I should die at once, that I had nearly died, and had been unconscious for a week. Well, of course, every man has a right to his own opinions. He thought a bath a very dangerous thing, but I am convinced that that one cured me. Any way, I got well, as you can see. If ever I have fever abroad again, I pray that I may be near one of those little British hospitals. They do wash you. Why, one of our men was in one of them, and he was washed all over every four hours. When they took his temperature they washed him—lucky beggar! And I was six weeks without even a cat lick!"

Another case I knew of was that of a girl who went to a non-washing country to be governess or something of that sort in a convent. She was very happy there for some time, until one day she was taken ill. She begged and prayed of the sisters, when she was ill, to let her wash or to wash her; but the doctor had forbidden baths, and the sisters evidently thought that sponging over in bed came under the head of baths, or just as likely they had never heard of such a proceeding. At last they began to fear that she would die, and reluctantly consented that she should, as she wished, see the English doctor.

When he arrived, she said, "Oh, doctor!

have me taken out of this into the English hospital, or I shall die. I am a disgust unto myself; I must be washed."

With great difficulty, and after much trouble she was transferred to the British hospital, where she had an English nurse; and after a long illness, was sent home convalescent.

When I heard there was one of these little hospitals in Oporto, I was anxious to go and see it. From the street that runs alongside the river one has the choice, either of going to the hospital by a very rough road that is nearly as steep as the roof of a house, or of climbing up ninety-six steps, some cut in living rock, all of granite and very steep. I chose the steps. At the side on which I arrived the building is only ten or twelve feet high. The large gates open into a courtyard from which there is a beautiful view of the river and the opposite shore. The hospital was at one time a monastery, and has some quaintly ornamented ceilings.

As one enters the little hall, the consulting room is on one side, the dispensary on the other. It is here that the English doctor sees his patients, his home being out of Oporto, by the sea. Beyond is the waiting room (a very charming room); beyond that again the general ward, containing four beds, a centre table, some bright pictures, and comfortable chairs; the beds all fitted with frames for mosquito curtains. Beyond this again is the house of the Dispenser, Master, and Nurse, one man fulfilling all these duties. Downstairs are the private wards and bath-rooms, also another general ward in course of construction.

The hospital, being built on the face of a steep cliff, has a good frontage, and every room, except the dispensary, one of the bath-rooms, and the isolation ward, looks on to the river. These last look on to the courtyards, of which there are two; one the principal entrance, the other the entrance to the Master's house.

The rooms are nearly all white-washed, which does not look cold owing to the bright sunshine. The sun shines here all day long for about eleven months out of the twelve. There is supposed to be about a month of rain, when the sun may or may not appear.

The Dispenser, who is an Irishman, received his training in the British Army, is a masseur, and, I am told, a very clever nurse. He has a Portuguese helper who can nurse, but has not been trained. When they have lady patients or any very serious case they have an English nurse, one being resident here for the benefit of the English colony. Should she be engaged, one can be obtained from England in less than three days.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)