

BRITISH MILITARY HOSPITALS IN THE ESTRELLA

(Lisbon)

(Contributed by Mrs. Jayne)

While it is generally conceded that the present Anglican parsonage, with an adjoining building since pulled down, were used as a hospital for the British wounded, and wounded French prisoners, during the Peninsular War, it is not so well known that the monastery of the Estrella was put to the same use on two occasions.

The following extracts are taken from a book in manuscript called the *Diario do Mosteiro da Estrella*, which is in the Biblioteca Nacional. In connection with the first the following circumstances must be recalled.

The French Revolution had plunged Europe into a witches cauldron of contending ideologies. Spain and Portugal took up arms in an alliance against atheist France, and the Portuguese under a Scot, General Forbes of Skelater, fought some gallant actions in the Eastern Pyrenees between 1793 and 1795. At this point the Spanish Court under the influence of the opportunist Godoy rather suddenly deserted its ally and concluded a separate peace with the French at Basle. This left the Prince Regent of Portugal with no alternative but to make peace on his own account but it was immediately clear that the Basle Treaty had gone much further than was at first apparent. It was in fact framed with the deliberate purpose of attaching Prussia and Spain to France and to unite all three

against Austria, England, and Portugal. In 1796 Spain declared war on England and hard on the heels of this news came information of a secret convention between France and Spain by which these two powers were to divide Portugal. Spanish troops were assembling on the frontier. The Portuguese Government applied to England for assistance. The House of Commons voted Portugal a sum of £ 200,000, and a force of 6,000 men was dispatched under Sir Charles Stuart. The Portuguese Government, on their side, set about making ready to receive them. An entry in the «Diario» runs as follows :

«The Secretary of Foreign Affairs and War has sent «the Prior an intimation by which he is informed that «he and his community must turn out of this college «with all possible speed and transfer themselves to the «Monastery of San Bento de Saude, leaving the former «place free to be used as a hospital for the English «Auxilliary Force which is on the point of arriving at «this port of Lisbon. 20th of January 1797.»

On this occasion the Spanish invasion came to nothing and it is possible that the hospital had few, if any, patients.

Ten years and some months passed before the monastery was once more requisitioned as a hospital, this time by the French who in December 1807 turned out the monks and installed their own sick.

«The Prior remained «in spite (says the «Dia- «rio») of the inconveniences which he suffered including «frights, shocks and difficulties in administrating the «Sacraments to the few who asked it ; going among «those sick of dangerous illnesses, evil smelling «prisoners, showing himself superior to all in a manner «beyond expression. Having, however, the good «fortune to be preserved until it fell out that on «September 15th of 1808 the English entered this city «in triumph. A day of gaiety and rejoicing for all. «The Prior had found means to save the church silver «from the contributions levied by the French, who «otherwise would have carried it off, and therefore was «he the more to be praised for keeping his residence

«in the college which otherwise would have lost
«everything.»

He did not immediately recover possession of his college,
for the English took the building and used it as a Military
Hospital, in the same way as the French did. The Prior —
perhaps thinking that one army was much the same as another
in some ways — continued to live among the invaders «without
being in any way separated from them up to the end of his
term of office».

«In the term which followed in 1810, the Military
«Hospital still continuing as such, the new Prior
«remained there with one companion and suffered consi-
«derable discomfort, often being unable either to enter
«or quit his cell because the sick and their appurtenances
«were placed across the door causing many bad smells
«etc. But on the 10th of Abril 1812 all the sick were
«removed and the college was left entirely free, except
«the vaults in which remained certain medical stores
«and certain cells which the Commissaries used as offices
«and so continued up to the beginning of the term
«which began in May 1813.» (1).

(1) Biblioteca Nacional B 12-6 733.