

Our Foreign Letter.

SOME EXPERIENCES OF A PRIVATE NURSE IN THE CANARY ISLANDS.

III.

BEGINNING TO WORK.

My instructions were "come at once, your luggage can be sent for later, you will get breakfast here." My "case box" had been ready packed for some days, so it did not take me long to put all my miscellaneous properties into my two larger trunks, arrange for them to be stored at the Hotel, pay my bill, and set out accompanied by a "muchachito" (a little ragamuffin, bareheaded and barefooted, his sole clothing, a shirt and a pair of faded blue cotton trousers, *of course*, smoking a cigarillo) carrying my two bags, one of which contained all my midwifery necessaries, and the other my cap, apron and toilet requisites.

A word here about luggage. Sometimes I have thought my surplus properties a great nuisance, and vowed another Summer to leave everything at home which was not absolutely essential to my work, but I have always thought better of it, and not committed so rash an act. A few books and photographs give a "homey" look to the barest of Hotel bedrooms, two or three simply made gowns (cotton or alpaca) to change, instead of the ones I had been working in, were refreshing; and it proved *most* useful to have always by me a small store of the most necessary drugs and appliances, for instance, quinine, phenacetin, sodamint, ergotin, calomel, and a spare Higginson's syringe, breast-pump, nozzles of various kinds, &c., &c., and a store of lint, cotton-wool, bandages, and so forth.

It was only a short walk; across the Plaza and down a narrow street in which I had to pass the barracks, and which led into the Alameda, where my patient's house was situated. The Alameda is a large enclosed space used as a playground by the children through the week, and as a promenade by the fashionable part of the community, when the band plays on Sunday afternoons, and on one evening in the week from 9 till 11. The custom is for the girls to walk up and down, *very* smartly dressed, arm in arm in rows of four or five together; right and left of them the young men promenade in the *opposite* direction, whilst the parents and other elders of the party sit about under the trees. These trees are principally Indian laurels and planes; there are also a few bright flower beds, but alas, no grass. Under foot is a kind of coarse white sand or finely-broken stone, I hardly know which; it is undoubtedly very clean and dry, but the eye soon tires of the perpetual sameness of its appearance. The climate is too dry for grass to be grown permanently; in the grounds of the Catalina Hotel croquet and tennis lawns have been sown again and again, without any lasting success, and now sand has been adopted for the one game and asphalt for the other. On my first return from Las Palmas to England (it was in early June), I was greatly impressed by the beauty of the fields and lawns, and I decided then that for perfection of country scenery my native land ranked high above any other I had seen. Oh dear, my patient is waiting for me a long time!!

Well! it turned out to be a very light case for a beginning. After having put everything ready in case of the worst happening, there remained very little to be done except to wait, and to hope that if it happened

it would be in the day time and not at night, for my instructions were in the latter case to call in a Spanish doctor who lived close at hand, whereas the doctor in charge was at some distance.

I was glad not to be very busy straight away, for everything, and everybody, was still so strange to me, and I was glad to have time to get accustomed to my surroundings.

The house was a Spanish one, and, in its plan and arrangements, typical of all the houses I have been into. The front door led into a "Gratio" (courtyard), open above to the glorious blue sky. Here was my bedroom next to the front door, then came the bath-room, and beyond, again, the entrance to the back Gratio, out of which were stables, wash-house storerooms, &c., and a back staircase leading up to the kitchens. Grouped in the front Gratio and all up the broad stone staircase were ferns, palms, aloes, etc., and many blossoming plants in pots such as roses, begonias, petunias, and geraniums. This staircase led into a "galleria" glazed and furnished, which overlooked the Gratio and from which opened off the drawing-room and my patient's bed-room. These two rooms were the only ones in this large house which possessed really external windows; they had a pleasant outlook over the Alameda. At right angles to this galleria ran another long narrow one leading past the nurseries, spare rooms, and dining room, to the kitchens and to another staircase by which one could climb on to the flat roof; such a grand place for drying and airing clothes in the sun, and here is a shed in which the ironing is done, and a collection of seed-boxes holding young seedling plants with which to re-stock the Gratio and the window boxes. All this is a very satisfactory arrangement for good weather but, a few weeks later, we had some bad storms of hail, rain, and wind, and then the gallerias were in a dripping condition; the rain poured down in the Gratio from the roof in small cascades, I could not get to my bed-room without cloak or umbrella, and several times I amused old Dolores, the cook, greatly, by going into her kitchen to warm myself. There was no other fireplace or stove of any description in the house, but is such a thing, as a rule, in the least necessary in the Canaries? Only occasionally, for my new-born babies' sake, I have longed for a fire by which to bathe and comfort them.

The meal hours in this establishment again reminded me, as the mosquitoes and the general oriental aspect of things in general had already often done, of India. (I occasionally greatly astonished Marcellina by speaking to her in Hindustani.)

In the English hotels, the meals are arranged to fall in with the ordinary Englishman's idea of at least three square meals in the day, and a few lighter ones in between, but here and in most of the English residents' houses in Las Palmas, the native custom with regard to this matter is most wisely followed. At 7 or 7.30 a.m., tea or coffee, bread and butter or toast with fruit, is served either in the dining-room or in the separate bedrooms. (Here my habit was to put my dressing gown on, and take my own cup of tea in my patient's room whilst attending to her requirements in that line; but I soon got accustomed to rising earlier, and going to bed also in good time); at 11 or 12 came the real breakfast, at 4 or 4.30 afternoon tea, and at 7 dinner. Thus the heavy midday meal is avoided greatly to the advantage of everyone concerned.

Now I felt still more strongly than before how necessary it was for me to master the language of the

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