

Our Foreign Letter.

SOME EXPERIENCES OF A PRIVATE NURSE IN THE CANARY ISLANDS.

I.

HOW SHE GOT THERE.

In the Autumn of 1895, after having migrated gradually southward from Glasgow to Bournemouth in a fruitless search for a climate sufficiently warm and dry to enable me to continue my work without being constantly disabled by ill-health, I was advised by my physician either to give up nursing altogether, and resign myself to a semi-invalid condition of self-preservation, or to go as soon as possible to the Canary Islands. About the same time a friend, a young doctor, returned from the Canaries where he had been travelling with an invalid, and he gave me a good deal of practical information about the "Fortunate Isles," as they are happily named in old manuscripts.

My mind was soon made up. I have always been fond of travelling, and this would be a good chance of seeing a new country, learning a new language, and becoming acquainted with a new people; there was a fair chance of obtaining nursing work, and last, but not least, there was a possibility of regaining health.

In case my readers have had a similar experience to my own, and found that many years, almost entirely devoted to nursing and the reading of books, etc., relating thereto, have made their brains sadly rusty, regarding any other topic, let me say here that the Canaries are a small group of islands lying about sixty miles off the West Coast of Africa, and about 120 miles south of Madeira. They belong to Spain, have a semi-tropical vegetation and climate, a very small rainfall and a very large amount of sunshine. So it can readily be understood that many invalids, especially those suffering from incipient phthisis or rheumatism, benefit very largely from a prolonged residence on them.

My preparations were soon made, and early in 1896 I left Liverpool in the s.s. *Bonny*, bound for various ports on the West Coast of Africa, but also taking mails and passengers for Grand Canary on her way. As it was so late in the season there were not many passengers for Las Palmas on board, and so I was able to have sole possession of the ladies' cabin which was intended to accommodate five grown-up people, although it was not in reality larger than an ordinary fair-sized bath-room.

As usual, I enjoyed the voyage very much, especially after the first three days; it was truly delightful to feel the gradually increasing warmth of atmosphere and brightness of sunshine as we steamed further and further south.

On the seventh day out we sighted the famous Peak of Teneriffe just at sunset, and whilst we were still distant 114 miles; and at sunrise the next morning I was awakened by the bustle of our entry into the Harbour of Puertos de la Luz (Port of the Light) so-called from the lighthouse on the Isleta at the entrance.

I have often been amused to hear such very diverse opinions expressed by visitors to the island regarding their experiences while staying there, and I have been led to the opinion that first impressions of a place have a good deal to do in determining whether one is to like that particular place or not; fortunately for me my first (though only the *very* first) impression of Las Palmas was a favourable one.

The city, facing south east, lay to our extreme right; flat-roofed white houses, surrounding the Roman Catholic Cathedral, stretch from the edge of the sea over a flat promontory of ground and half way up the little hill behind, interspersed by solitary palms and groups of other tropical trees. These hills behind extend towards us almost to the harbour, only broken by an occasional barranco (water-course); on them are various little Spanish forts and signal houses, and also the English golf-links, and behind them, again, rise up the glorious range of inland mountains, the Cumbraes, looking truly beautiful just now, with the sunrise light creeping over them.

To our left is the Isleta, not really an island but connected to the mainland only by a low-lying stretch of white sand only wide enough to carry a road between the town and the port. (Of this sandy road more to be said hereafter.) Around the base of the Isleta and on the wider parts of the isthmus are the houses, depôts, coaling stations, etc., of the Puerto de la Luz. Far away behind these may be just discerned the Island of Teneriffe with its Peak's sun-topped summit shining rosy-red among the clouds. About half-way between the town and harbour lies the English colony; just visible amongst the trees of its beautiful gardens are the roofs of the Santa Catalina Hotel, my very comfortable headquarters during most of my stay in Grand Canary. Near it is another large English hotel, the English church, and a fair number of dwellings of English residents. Add to this the large harbour with its many picturesque ships from all parts of the world, and the long Mole crowded even at this early hour by noisy, brightly clothed Spainards, imagine the whole brilliantly illuminated by the early morning sunshine, and you will readily understand my first impression being a good one. The novelty, brightness, and picturesqueness of the scene, and the delicious warmth of the atmosphere made me forget for a while the fact that I was a stranger in a strange land, and seemed to bring perceptibly nearer the health which I had come in search of.

II.

SETTLING DOWN.

"So sorry, not an empty bed anywhere; even the ladies' drawing-room and the bathrooms are occupied." This was discouraging, for I liked much the general appearance of the hotel, and had brought an introduction to the manager's wife, a most truly kind-hearted woman, and a trained nurse who had formerly held a responsible position in one of our largest provincial hospitals. However, she gave me breakfast and much good advice, and then sent me under the guidance of the hotel nurse into the town to a small old-established English hotel; and here I secured a room on fairly reasonable terms.

A fair-sized lofty room [looking at first sight rather bare to English eyes from lack of carpet or fire, but amply making up for that by the abundant sunshine streaming in through the open window, and by the brightness of the flowers with which the garden outside was filled.

No English servants here, so I was glad that I had spent some of the many idle hours on board ship in studying a Spanish grammar, and so knew some of the most every day phrases and words. I began at once to take daily lessons in the language, and was soon able to ask for all I needed, but it was months before I could understand what a Spaniard said to me.

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