

Our Foreign Letter.

SOME EXPERIENCES OF A PRIVATE NURSE IN THE CANARY ISLANDS.

IV. HOSPITAL AND HOUSEKEEPING.



I RATHER dread writing about my experiences in the little Hospital for English Seamen, lest a personal dislike which I have always

felt for it and its surroundings (especially the latter), should lead me into giving an erroneous impression of a most well-managed and well-deserving institution. Probably this dislike was really caused by the stormy weather, and the dread I was constantly in lest the exposure to it would cause a fresh access of pulmonary trouble just when I was beginning to lose the cough which had troubled me for so long.

The Hospital was originally an old Spanish house, only rather more rambling even than usual owing to various additions having been made at different times. The latest of these additions was a very pleasant airy ward to accommodate five patients, sailors, presumably, and generally English, but very often German, and occasionally belonging to other nationalities. Scattered over the house are several smaller rooms used for private patients, sitting, dining, and bed rooms for the nurses, and convenient kitchen and storerooms. The private rooms, as well as the ward, were all full at the time of my first visit to the Hospital, and it was for the private patients that I was especially needed, but I had charge also of the ward during my hours on duty.

My "illest" patient lay in a fairly large, airy room on the ground floor, but at a considerable distance from the ward; he had been landed from a ship and brought into hospital because of having sustained a fractured thigh (it had happened some three or four days before but the ship's surgeon had not discovered it, and the unfortunate man had been tossing about in his berth without any attempt having been made at fixing the limb or setting the bone,) but he was dying from kidney and heart disease, for which troubles he had been ordered a long sea voyage, and which had been greatly aggravated by the shock of the accident. Poor fellow! he was a tall, powerfully built Scotchman, now at times lying in a semi-conscious condition, but generally very restless and delirious; he should have had two good nurses always at hand to lift and attend to him at all properly. The other private patient was also very ill; dysentery, fever, vomiting and great exhaustion, the sequelae of "black water" fever of which he had several attacks at Kumassie and on the way from there to Canary. He was an Army Medical Officer, and like most other doctors *very* nervous about himself when ill, so that he would have preferred to have his nurse always within call; whereas, I could only pay him flying visits for *his* room was about a five minutes journey from all the other patients, down passages and up stairs, almost on to the roof. These two men had different doctors, each of whom

naturally wished to have his own patient well looked after!

I was on night duty, and my sole help was a Spaniard, a very good-natured, capable man who really preferred to help with the nursing rather than attend to his own work—which was scrubbing, going messages, etc.; but, as he was really very busy all day, I did not like to call him up often at night.

On the third or fourth day the most serious case died. When I went on duty that night his room had already been cleaned, and the bed was occupied by a new patient. What was my surprise at about midnight to hear a commotion outside as of many footsteps and voices, and then a sort of subdued knock at one of the outside doors.

It was a wild, stormy night, and there had been even more noises than usual going on all round the Hospital (it is situated in a horrid neighbourhood right amongst the poorest and worst houses), and for a minute or two I hesitated about opening the door without calling up either Manuel or my fellow-nurse. However, I soon thought better of that, and as soon as the door was unbolted I was a good deal re-assured, but also considerably mystified, to hear an unmistakably English voice say, "I am the English Consul and I have come to take away the corpse." At that time I knew nothing of the Spanish regulations with regard to burial, and in the stress of evening work no one had remembered to tell me of the expected night visit, and, what was much more serious, I had not the least idea *where* the corpse was to be found. At the back of the hospital, round a very large open courtyard in which just then the rain and wind were raging to such an extent that we could not carry a light across, are a number of out-houses, some used for domestic purposes, others empty. What an eerie search it was in the wet and dark, and how afraid I was all the time lest the noise and bustle should disturb my nervous patient, from whom we had carefully concealed the fact that a death had taken place.

There is a beautiful little English cemetery in Las Palmas, a short distance from the town; so full of flowers, that it is more like a well-attended garden enclosed within high walls, than anything else; such a contrast to the Spanish one where the custom is to place the coffin in a niche for a certain number of years, varying according to the amount of money paid. When the time has expired the coffin is removed and the niche used for a new proprietor, the coffin being thrown on to a huge ghastly heap of bones at the end of the cemetery. That there shall be *only* bones left is ensured by a law requiring every coffin to be filled up with quicklime. Enough of such a gruesome subject.

We moved my fever patient to the Catalina Hotel as soon as there was an empty room to be got there, and after that he was soon well enough for me to move on to another much more urgent case, viz., hæmoptysis occurring for the third time in an advanced case of phthisis. A private house in a delightful situation close to the Catalina Gardens, but standing rather higher upon the hill, and so overlooking them, and some cultivated fields, to the sea and harbour. A little house with very capacious verandahs above and below, out of which and into each other the rooms opened; such a magnificent view over the sea, harbour, and isleta, interesting also, for with the help of a telescope, we could read the names on the approaching vessels, and so know just when to expect our precious home letters.

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