

CORRESPONDENCE.

HOUSEKEEPING IN SANTIAGO DE CUBA.

Santiago de Cuba, Aug. 18th.

When Surgeon General Sternberg's female immunes arrived in Santiago, a month after the battle, no provision had been made for them. They waited two days on board the Olivette in the harbor, when General Wood, military governor of the city, came to Miss Barton and said: "For God's sake tell me what to do with Sternberg's nurses? There is work enough for them in the hospital, but where can they eat and sleep? They can't remain on the Olivette, for she goes to sea tomorrow; nor can they stay every hour of the twenty-four with the men in the hospital. There are some young ladies from good families among them, and they must have suitable protection when not on duty."

It was really not Miss Barton's business, in the mission of Cuban relief on which our good President had sent her; but since the surgeon general had neglected this branch of his own department, she promptly shouldered the burden. "Send the nurses ashore," said she. "They can go to work at once in the hospital, and before night a place shall be provided for them."

An empty house was immediately secured, furniture rented, necessary crockery and cooking utensils purchased and a couple of Cuban negresses engaged to do the work. But who could spare time to superintend the thing? One glimpse of the slipshod servants who understood no word of English, showed the necessity of a head. The immune ladies had come to "nurse," not to house-keep, and every member of the Red Cross party was already overworked to the limit of endurance. At this juncture your correspondent—who is merely a visitor in Santiago—offered her services as matron, pro tem, for the nurses home. "Why could you? Would you?" said Miss Barton, with a sigh of relief.

"I can and I will, was the answer." Show me the house; send me the brooms, mops, soap, servants and rations; and you may tell the ladies that dinner will be waiting for them at 7 p.m." And so I assumed my inglorious role among the workers in Cuba.

"I dreamt I dwelt in marble halls"—a dream came true. Ours is a big, bare palace, the once splendid home of some proud grandee, but like its owner, now decidedly down at the heel. Its high ceiled rooms, mostly without partitions and partly divided by lofty arches, present an imposing vista of "magnificent distances," courtyards and corridors. Double doors of stained glass, extending half way up, afford some privacy to the bed-rooms, while admitting free circulation of air. The beautiful floor are of white and colored marbles, laid in patterns, like a patchwork quilt; walls frescoed and painted in panels, the rafters hidden by white canvas, stretched taut overhead; and the great windows, without glass, and open from floor to ceiling, are furnished with iron bars outside and latticed shutters within. Nothing can be more picturesque than the ancient casas of Santiago—all stuccoed and painted in time-mellowed tints of rose ink, sky blue, pea-green and yellow; their projecting roofs of red tiles covered with the moss of centuries, their quaint verandas, barred windows and enormous doors. But every one of them is typically Castilian in character—brave and beautiful front, dwindling to unparalleled poverty and meanness behind the outward showing. Like other palaces of the old regime,

ours was extremely dirty, infested with vermin and void of every convenience. Soap, water and eternal vigilance have somewhat modified the first-mentioned evils and necessity mothers many make-shifts in the latter time. The hired furniture, for which alone we pay \$25 per month, (the rent of the empty house is fifty dollars, American gold)—consists in a hundred chairs, marble-topped stand and cane couch in the parlor, rickety side-board and dining table, two useless kerosene lamps, and in each sleeping apartment a wardrobe, dresser and bare iron bedstead, without mattresses or covering. Fifty United States dollars bought a very limited supply of pots, pans and dishes—and most of those articles are lacking which are considered indispensable in every northern kitchen. Hence "the mother of invention" turns every empty tin can into service, its edges neatly hammered with a stone; every crate, box and meal-sack is eagerly seized upon and devoted to some important use, and a lard-pail is regarded as little short of a boon from heaven. Have we occasion for a bread-board and rolling-pin—the clean bottom of a dish-pan serves the former purpose, while a glass bottle does excellent duty in the latter capacity. Every trunk masquerades as couch or table; a ward-robe is pantry, cup-board and locker; the sheets of an army cot answer for table-cloth, and a cambric petticoat has been converted into napkins. To be sure, we might dispense with such luxuries as the two last named—but when the wearied nurses return at night, aching in every fibre from a long day's toil, their refuge should bear the nearest possible resemblance to a real home. If the reader imagines that under these conditions the house-mother's task is an easy one, let him, or her, come and try it awhile. We are subsisting upon army rations, eked out by Red Cross supplies—such as beans, bacon, hardtack, cornmeal, tinned beef and coffee—plentiful and good in quality. The daily menu—bacon, fried mush and coffee for breakfast; tinned beef, beans and hardtack for dinner—will sustain life indefinitely and serves excellently well even every day for a week. But eternal sunshine grows monotonous in time, and the best things pall when too often repeated? Our kitchen is a fair sample of Castilian character in architecture. Beyond the vast, marble-floored sala and dining-room, a long, arched corridor leads past open court-yards and rows of bed-rooms to the rear of the casa, where some holes in the thick adobe walls—windowless, doorless, dark and destitute of every convenience, constitute the culinary department. There is neither table, chair, shelf, nor cup-board. The dishes are washed on a mound of adobe, out in the open patio, where—if Cuban customs were strictly followed, they would be left till wanted, to dry themselves at leisure in the sun. The so-called range is an adobe altar, breast high and faced with broken tiles, with three holes in it, the size of small plant-pot. In each hole you build a separate charcoal fire, bottom-side up, so to say—that is, with the kindling on top. It smokes, of course, like "all possessed," while you fan it vigorously with anything at hand; and by the time the blaze gets well "going," the charcoal has burned out and you must begin again. Over these tiny fires all the cooking is done there being no oven, no gas, no other alternative. As cultivators of the Christian graces, these Cuban ranges are without a parallel; and when one has so possessed her soul in patience that she can prepare a three-course dinner with-

out once mislaying her temper, she is surely ripe for a better world.

Our servants match the kitchen to a T. They are elderly negresses, with families of their own, and like mother-birds, they nightly convey to the home nest every morsel of food not carefully locked up in the wardrobe. Their every-day costume is distinctive if not appropriate. It consists of a single, voluminous white skirt, very short in front and trailing behind, with a low necked bodice and short, puffed sleeves, leaving the skinny arms bare to the shoulder. The front of the corsage is elaborately embroidered and secured by a string at the top, tied so loosely, if tied at all, that a strip of bare bronze back stands confessed to the waistline. The wooly heads, gray with the weight of years, are topped with gaudy turbans; the bare feet are thrust into slippers of white canvas, and when my lady walks abroad she covers her gaping back with a bedraggled white silk shawl. Both women consider themselves monuments of virtuous industry in consenting to lend a helping hand to las Americanas—for could they not, like all their neighbors, be well fed without work, so long as Cuban relief supplies hold out. But they are not injuring their constitutions by hard labor! When not sitting in the front windows, smoking cigarettes and gossiping with friends outside, their aimless stepshod feet go slapping about the marble floors, like the stars, "unhasting yet unresting." The slow, monotonous slap, slap, slap, of those heelless slippers so wears upon the nerves that one indulges in strange flights of fancy as to what might accelerate their movements. Should the seven angels of the Apocalypse, carrying the seven golden vials filled with wrath, heralded by trumpet notes and wrapped about with awful glory, come knocking some fine day at our front door—slap, slap would go those same slow feet toad mit them.

My family of nineteen includes Miss Annie Wheeler, a daughter of ex-Governor Packard of Louisiana, several ladies from New Orleans, two Cubanams from Key West, and several others from various parts of the South, all madly immunes, recruited for the work by Mrs. Curtis of Washington.

As every moment of time must be spent to the best advantage, where such an ocean of suffering is to be staid by a few frail hands, we breakfast at 5:30 a.m.; and immediately afterwards each goes on her own appointed way, to hospital, dispensary or consultorio. The dinner hour is set for 7:30; but often it is 8, or even 9 p.m. before the tired ladies can leave their pressing duties, to snatch a hasty meal; and then go straight to bed for a few hours-needed rest. If your imagination is fertile enough, you may perhaps fancy some of the experiments I have tried by way of making a change in the daily menu with the materials at hand—essaying French toast, of hardtack soaked in condensed milk and fried in bacon fat; hash of canned beef, minus potatoes and a chopper; corn bread, baked in a frying-pan over an uncertain charcoal fire, and savory ragouts compounded of all the odds and ends obtainable. Occasionally I ransack the city market in search of something new, and then my experiences are indeed varied and entertaining.

On such occasions I am accompanied by one or both of the elderly hand-maidens, who, in addition to their trailing white skirts and silken shawls, wear each a wide smile, which she would fain make wider were it not for the position of her ears. Up and down the steep and dirty streets we toll—those everlasting slippers slapping the stones a few paces behind me; until the