

AFFAIRS OF TODAY IN THE CANARIES

A Province of Spain, Managed for Profit—Life Among the People—The Guanches, or Aboriginal People.

Special Correspondence.

Santa Cruz, Tenerife, Dec. 4.—How-
ever fine the scenery or quaint the ar-
chitecture of unfamiliar countries, it is
after all, the people, with their strange
costumes and customs, that most in-
terest the traveler. The Canary archi-
pelago has long been a province of
Spain—not a colony, as was Cuba and
other western possessions; and so well
did the Norman baron, Jean de Beth-
en-court do his work, when he con-
quered the seven islands in the name
of Juan II, of Castile—exactly five
hundred years ago next June—that the
population of today is as thoroughly
Spanish in thought and feeling as na-
tives of the step-mother country. There
are about three hundred and fifty thou-
sand people, all told, in the islands,
and as merged a collection as can be
found anywhere in equal space. Being
descended from Phoenicians, Cartha-
genians, Moors and negroes mixed with
all the races of modern Europe, they
are darker in color than even the peo-
ple of southern Spain, where Moorish
blood predominates. Most of them are
simple, amiable folk, devoted to
such agriculture as the soil and cli-
mate admits. Industrious as might be
expected under a tropical sun, with no
lofty ambitions and easily ruled by
their self-appointed task masters.

Far greater interest centers around
the Guanches, or aboriginal inhabi-
tants of the Canaries, about whose ori-
gin ethnologists and historians are yet
quarreling, though the race has been
extinct two or three centuries. Some
maintain that the Guanches were an
offshoot from one of the Libyan tribes
of nearby Africa, because the few
words that have been preserved of
their language resemble the Berber dia-
lects of today. Others find equal proof
of their Greek or Roman origin in the
fact that they had fair skins, blue eyes
and long, straight hair, often red or
sandy—which are certainly not African
characteristics. Perhaps they belong-
ed to the lost continent, Atlantis, of
which, if it ever existed, these islands
were a part—descendants of the Noah
of that ancient catastrophe which

drowned a world. At any rate, all
authorities agree that the original in-
habitants of the "Happy Islands," the
"Garden of Hesperides," the "Elysian
Fields," as the group has been known
to various nations, were a tall and
handsome race, brave and strong, and
such good fighters that their wooden
spears and arrows several times repel-
led Spanish and Portuguese expeditions
sent to subjugate them. But those
primitive weapons could not long with-
stand the power of firearms. Most of
the Guanches were killed in opposing
invasions; many were sold by their
conquerors as slaves, and most of the
remainder perished in the terrible pesti-
lence of 1494—caused, it is said, by
the great number of dead bodies left
unburied by the Spaniards after the
battle of Laguna.

History tells us that the ancient peo-
ple had no boats, and therefore could
hold no communication with the main
land, nor with the several islands; so
that each island was a little kingdom
by itself, with a different dialect and
its own laws and customs. Their food
was gophers, or roasted corn mixed with
goat's milk; and they also ate cheese,
fish, fruit and fresh meat. Their
clothes were of skins, sewed together
with fish-bone needles; and a few wore
shirts made of plaited rushes—
those of the married wo-
men being longer than those
of the men. The historian quaintly adds:
"The maidens of the 'Fortunate Is-
lands' went about quite naked, but
without consciousness of shame, such
was their innocence. They sang sweet-
ly and danced almost as well as
Frenchmen." In religion the Guanches
were theists, worshipping the God of
earth and heaven, air and water; they
believed in immortality, and in rewards
and punishments after death. A few
had stone houses, thatched with palm,
but the majority were troglodytes, or
dwellers in caves. By the way, the cus-
tom of turning the soft, volcanic rock
into habitations has never been entire-
ly abandoned by the islanders. Espe-
cially in Gran Canaria you may see
many cave-dwellings yet in use, though
the modern ones have face-walls and
many improvements. Among the great-
est "sights" of the islands are the
stone houses and honey-combed rocks
of the aborigines, and their catacombs

in the cliffs. The Guanches embalmed
their dead and then hid them in the
most inaccessible caverns they could
find. High up in a vertical cliff, just
back of this point of Santa Cruz, are
two immense caverns, said to be crowd-
ed with mummies. There are many oth-
ers, notably those at Icod de los Vinos.
In the rocky cliffs that environ Gran
Canaria, and—greatest of all and last
discovered—the catacombs in the pre-
cious of Guimar. The last named cav-
erns have as yet been little explored,
for they can be reached only by one
who is courageous enough to let him-
self be lowered over the edge of the
cliffs, where he hangs suspended above
tremendous surf pounding more than
a thousand feet below—until his feet
finally touch a narrow shelf of rock
at the mouth of a cavern which runs
sharply downward into eternal dark-
ness. Nobody knows to what depths.
Neither your correspondent nor any of
her party are brave enough to venture
on such a gruesome expedition; but
we have been so fortunate as to meet
a couple of zealous Scotch antiquarians,
who have spent several years in the
Canaries and explored a number of the
catacombs. They say that the great-
est danger is in the superstitions of the
people. It is almost impossible to in-
duce any Canary islander to assist
you in visiting the ancient tombs, be-
lieving that the ghosts of those who
were hidden with such care will wreak
dire vengeance on intruders. After we
have succeeded in hiring a company of
peasants to lower you over the cliff
and secured their courage up to the
sticking point with gold and wine, they
are likely to desert at the slightest
noise—even to let go the rope and run
away, leaving you to drop into the rag-
ing surf, or to perish in the darkness
of the catacombs.

The mummies are found standing erect
around the wall of rock, each with a
stout staff in his hand, and at his feet
a clay pot, which is supposed to have
contained coffee for the soul's food on
its long journey. No antiseptic prepa-
ration seems to have been used in the
mummifying process, but the bowels
of the corpse were removed and the
cavity filled with seeds. No trace of
bandages nor clothes of any kind has
been found, but each mummy is sewed
up in tanned goat-skins, the outer
covering decorated with raw-hide
things, like fringe, knotted in a pe-
culiar fashion, and hung with little
discs of baked earth. Wooden spears,
also found in the catacombs, elabo-
rately carved and tipped with ob-
sidian; arrow-heads; hand mills for
grinding gophers; leather pitchers for
holding water, wine and milk; bowls
of baked clay, unglazed; small bones,
supposed to represent money; and clay
pipes, similar to those found in some
of the old Kistvaens of Ireland. So it
may be inferred that the Guanches
were smokers—though, like the an-



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cient Irish, they may not have
smoked tobacco. The comparative-
ly recent discovery of sculptured
stones in the Canaries, covered
with symbols precisely
like those found on similar stones
near the shores of Lake Superior,
is regarded as priceless nuggets of proof
in favor of Atlantis by those who ad-
vocate the theory of a lost continent. In
the museum of Los Palmas, on Gran
Canaria island, may be found a good
many relics of the aborigines; but noth-
ing which seems to speak of them so
forcibly as the colossal group of statu-
ary in the plaza of Santa Cruz. It re-
presents the popular tradition of the ap-
pearance of the Virgin of Candelaria to
the four kings of the Guanches, which
is believed to have taken place in the
year 1332. The statue is of the finest
Carrara marble and well executed—the
beautiful female figure upon a pedestal,
supported by the four Indian monarchs,
each of whom carries a huge thigh-
bone for a war club. Sad to say, the
illustrations of five enjoy but one
nose among them, and that is the
topmost, probably because the virgin's
countenance happens to be just beyond
the reach of vandals' "middles."
The Canary Islander of today is not a
handsome creature, whether male or fe-
male, young or old. The common type,
universal in all the islands, consists of
a tall, bony frame, an elongated head,
lunely chiseled mouth and nose and
brown face very large and heavy, in
which the small blue eyes look as lone-
some as two wattleberries on a big
wooden platter. The dress of each is-
land shows some peculiarity different
from all the others—that is, among the

peasantry. Of course the true Canary
costumes are seen only on the peasantry,
the higher classes being entirely Span-
ish or European, who wear imported
clothes—all but hats and shoes, which
are made in the Canaries. Strange to
say, men, women and children are ac-
customed to walk barefooted over the
plains that are filled with spiny cacti,
and the burning rocks of lava which in
a few hours will wear out the stoutest
shoes. They all have shoes, but it is
the fashion to wear them only in the
easy streets of the towns. If you meet
them anywhere else, the men are in-
variably carrying their shoes at the
end of a stick, and the women econo-
mizing their's by wearing them on their
heads. The women of Tenerife wear
a skirt and apron of cotton, and a well-
fitted bodice with enormous sleeves and
a sort of fichu, which ends in points
both behind and in front. When abroad
the head is covered with a large square
of white cotton cloth, or a white knitted
shawl, the corners of which dangle
gracefully down the back. On top of
the shawl is placed a small straw hat,
low crowned and saucer shaped; and on
top of the hat may be a bundle, or jar
of water, a few vegetables, or a load of
faggots, besides the precious shoes.
The use of the shawl, or square of
cloth, is to protect the wearer's neck
from the pest of stinging flies, and also
to shade the spine from the sun, which
is believed to bring on ague or rheuma-
tism.

The men of the lower classes still
wear the blanket-cloak, which bulges
out in stiff and barrel-like rotundity
and looks absurd enough when the
mercury is soaring up toward the nineties.
One of the greatest events in the
simple lives of these Tenerifians is the
purchase of a new cloak, which requires
days of deliberation and the combined
wisdom of the purchaser's friends and
family. Certain qualifications must en-
ter into its composition, lacking which
it would be no use to offer one over any
counter in the islands. In the first
place, the blanket must be white as
snow—though its wearer will soon con-
vert it to muddy brown and never think
of washing it, should it last a lifetime.
It must have two stripes of sky-blue
near the neck, and the other narrow, all around
the edges; and the nap must run down-
ward, in order to make it shed rain
properly. A running string at the top
fastens this queer garment around the
throat, and not another thing needs to
be worn above or below it. The fashion
of this primitive cloak is as old as the
Guanches—as old as the first attempt at
general clothing made by any nation in
its infancy. It corresponds to the abba,
worn by the Arab and the Beduin in
the sandy deserts of Arabia to the bur-
nouse of the Algerian; the plaid of the
Highlander; the toga of the Ro-
man; the flowing garment of the Druid;
the blanket of the American Indian;



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the zepare of the Mexican and the pon-
cho of the South American.
Not least important in the outfit of
every peasant in the Canaries, male or
female, is the dirty string of wool or
leather, worn around the neck, and sus-
pended from it an amulet blessed by
the priest—for a consideration!—and
which preserves the wearer from the
evil eye and other harmful influences.
On Lanzarote island the men as a rule
are much smaller than the women, and
decidedly less masculine in appearance.
The silens wear their hair short, have
luxuriant moustaches on their upper
lip, and are passionately devoted to
smoking cigars. The wives make all
their husbands' clothes with their own
brawny hands and trick their little
darlings out in gorgeous array. Thus,
when in full dress a Lanzarote man
wears knee-trousers, lined with bright
ribbons and long-streamers; sleeveless
jacket of red, green, or yellow cloth, a
silken blue cap, embroidered with all
the colors of the rainbow and displaying
a knot of ribbons at one side. Natu-
rally these treasured men do not work—
such duties being left to their dotting
wives.

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Ladies' Fleece Melba Union Suits,
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PRICE **40c**
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regular price \$1.50, SALE PRICE **85c**
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