Notes from a feminist's travel diary: Madrid

BY MUNA LEE, '12

1. Clara Campoamor

"SHE will be busy!" warns the old concierge as he opens the elevator door and pushes the button that sends us jerking upward. She *is* busy. Clara Campoamor's anteroom and outer office are filled with waiting clients, men and women. From the inner office comes a steady hum of conversation, with a feminine voice, clear, pleasant, and emphatic, audible now and again in an energetic phrase. She is standing by her desk, not sitting, as one enters at last, summoned by a pretty secretary with a notebook in her hand.

Clara Campoamor stands during much of our talk, moves about, returns. The effect is of intensity and force. She is a vivid person, with dramatic black eyebrows above large brown eyes with a level gaze. Even in repose she gives the impression of being on the alert.

Her father was a well known journalist, but he died when Clara was hardly more than a child. She was faced with the necessity of earning a living in a country which made small provision for such necessity then on the part of its women. A painful period of struggle ended when she obtained a position as telegrapher and journeyed to Saragossa and San Sebastian. Later she held a position in the ministry of public instruction and fine arts; later still, as teacher of stenography and typewriting in the State schools. She studied law, was admitted to the bar in 1925, and opened her law office in Madrid.

Feminist and Revolutionist, she was working to build the Republic while she worked to build her own life. The Republic once established, she has organized an association of women of all parties who are united for safeguarding "its liberal and democratic principles."

She is famed for her eloquence. When the Constitution of the Republic was being drawn up, Clara Campoamor and Victoria Kent clashed on the floor of the Córtes. Both believed in suffrage, but Victoria Kent believed that the women of Spain were not ready for the vote; that education for republican life should precede it. Clara Campoamor answered her with all the eloquence of passionate conviction reinforced by the bitter experience of hard years of struggle.

"We cannot hesitate and compromise" she cried. "If the Republic is to endure, Spain must trust her women!"

And so votes for women on equal terms with men was written into the basic law of the new Spain.

2. Margarita Nelken

Margarita Nelken's apartment looks out over the Paseo de la Castellana, Madrid's fashionable drive, flanked with embassies and great houses, with the shaded promenade down the center where nurses with enormous frilled bonnets like huge white gillyflowers walk solemnly up and down with their small charges.

"If I were not sick I should not have been here today to see you!" says Margarita Nelken. We both smile. I have been trying to see her for a week. When not actually in the Córtes, she is always away —lecturing on the purposes and obligations of the Republic to voters in the cities along the coast, in small mountain villages, in the arid upland towns. "Will you permit me to finish dictating this letter first?" she asks. I look at her appreciatively while I wait. Hers is an alien, tawny-haired loveliness. Her parents were German, I recall. But her room is wholly and delightfully Spanish, furnished discriminatingly with the best of that satisfying Spanish folk-art which is so simple in outline and so rich and subtle in coloring. A hanging in magenta, violet, and electric blue is the background for a carved oak chest. Charming pottery animals walk across the mantel. A dark oak table with iron braces gleams with two centuries of wax.

Margarita Nelken finishes her letter and is swiftly the gracious charming hostess. She asks about the woman in North America; in South America. And what are women doing in the Antilles? With difficulty I focus our conversation on herself. Will she tell me why her election to the Córtes was contested and how she won her seat?

She makes an expressive gesture with the long slender hand of an artist.

"Nationality!" said Margarita Nelken. "Nationality! I was born in Madrid of German parents. They registered me at birth as a Spanish citizen but I had not registered again on attaining my majority, though I had held a government appointment given only to Spanish citizens. But when the voters of Badajoz elected me to represent them, there was a great campaign against permitting me to take my seat."

"And how was the matter settled?"

"Oh, very simply!" laughed Margarita Nelken. "The Córtes voted that I be a citizen, and that's how I became the only person who has acquired citizenship by vote!"

3. Victoria Kent

Tall and slender, with dark eyes and dark hair, a wholly Castilian charm and distinction, Victoria Kent has little obvious connection with her English surname. The remote British ancestor who bequeathed it to her, bequeathed nothing apparent to the eye. Spanish of the Spanish, Victoria Kent sat down beside me upon the sofa in her office in the ministry of prisons, and talked with me about women in her country and mine.

"We must have realities!" was the underlying theme of her talk. "We have had rhetoric so long!"

She is director of prisons, this earnest low-voiced woman, and her work in reforming the Spanish prison system has been news in the headlines of the world.

The first woman to be admitted to the bar in Spain, Victoria Kent was one of the lawyers who defended the revolutionists when they were on trial for their lives. She has the popular and official confidence to a remarkable degree.

"You would better see what Victoria Kent says about it," is a remark one hears often.

Her office is in the ministry of justice, a grim building on a noisy cluttered street. Her anteroom is filled, always, with petitioners; old peasant women in dusty sandals who have walked from Southern Spain with a plea for Victoria Kent to save a son from prison; women with strained faces, in fashionable street suits; men of all classes. It is a tense atmosphere, that of Victoria Kent's antechamber; but the tension relaxes unconsciously when Victoria Kent herself appears for a moment in the door, a pale, grave woman with a smile of great sweetness, and with a quiet word makes them welcome and promises to see each one in turn.

One may disagree with Victoria Kent on questions of policy; one could never doubt her sincerity and intellectual integrity. She has the practicality of the Spaniard, that realistic race so romanticized and falsified by most foreign commentators. Her first act as director of prisons was to revise the diet of the prisoners and see that it was balanced and adequate. Her second was to cut down

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who had been privileged to live near this beautiful character. I know of no one whose ideals of Christian womanhood were higher, more sincere or more helpful. The dignity of her life was contagious; unhurried, always poised, she had time for every plea, every demand. The community has never been able to find a substitute for her gentle ministrations."

Miss Ruth Moore, instructor in piano, recalled her student days in King Hall.

"I lived there in 1917-'18 and '19," Miss Moore said. "During the war they had the Students' Army Training Corps here. The 'war-line' over which the boys were not allowed to cross without permission from the military heads ran along Duffy in front of King Hall.

"We had two dances a year then and the boys would have to get permission from the military heads to cross the street and come to the dances.

"I'll never forget the night some of the men got permission . . . and some of them were there anyway. During the dance a few couples went down to the Varsity . . . Oh! My land, yes, it was *the* Corner then. There wasn't any place else to go; it was the only shop we had. Well, they went down in couples and coming back the guard stopped some of them, sent the men back to the barracks and let the girls go home alone.

"One of the funniest things that happened, it was funny to us then, was the time a Spanish professor paid a friendly call and, backing out of the house in polite continental fashion, landed on the lawn."

The way the two houses were put together caused any one who was not familiar with the entrances to think there were steps where there weren't, Miss Moore explained. Even professors are likely to err once in awhile.

It was hoped that a similar house might be built for men, but as time went on, more sorority houses and dormitories were built and eventually King Hall was given over to men. It was so occupied up to the time of its razing this spring.

"Original plans were to build a quadrangle," Mr Lindloff said. "The concrete structure was to have been one unit of it."

Others were to be added later until the four groups of connected buildings with a court in the center made a complete quadrangle. Due to lack of funds this project has been temporarily abandoned and with the gift from undesignated legacies in the east, either a student center or a church could be built. Mr Lindloff explained.

Since Mr Lindloff's arrival in 1930, more seating space in the little St. John's Episcopal chapel was provided, but even that did not accommodate the congregation. Thereupon plans were worked out by Charles A. Popkin, Tulsa, architect; Rev Thomas Cassidy, bishop of the Oklahoma Episcopal churches, and Mr Lindloff for the new St. John's Episcopal church which will be ready for occupation when school opens in September. J. H. Fredrickson, Oklahoma City, is the contractor.

The junior church composed of children from about four to fourteen years old has increased fifty percent since Lindloff has been here. They shall continue to meet in the little chapel. The Student Forum, a group of university students, which Mr Lindloff introduced this year shall have a meeting place provided them and it is hoped that a student center might be added to the church in the near future.

King Hall memories of student life remain although the building itself has given place to a greater need that the work might move forward.

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expenses by consolidating prisons and abolishing those that were insanitary or superfluous. The good of the prisoner and the good of the state; efficiency and economy: the dual purpose motivates her official life.

"Will you tell the women of the United States for me how touched and surprised I was by their generous enthusiasm when I was named to office?" she asked me. "It overwhelmed me to receive so many messages of congratulation and good wishes from the United States. Tell them," she added, with the sudden warm smile which erases the weariness from her face, "that they gave me a sense of friendship and companionship which has made your country seem very close to mine."

THE QUEST FOR UNDERSTANDING

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ing—that such a state of affairs is unjust, unchristian, undesirable—has been one stage in my quest for understanding. The other stage, equally important, is of another sort. It is that the Negro is not, as it gratifies the Nordics to think, an inferior species but a man with great abilities, highly desirable qualities, and strengths, which if given an outlet, will do much for the improvement of our American civilization.

This latter point of view was gradually developed in the course of time, chiefly through reading and through conversations with high-minded men and women who had achieved their goal in the quest for understanding. I have learned that in Africa the Negro has a long heritage of high civilization, that though transplanted in the alien soil of America and forced into slavery, he has nevertheless made valuable contributions to our civilization and that he is now entering a period in which, if given the chance, he will accomplish incomprehensibly worthwhile things. I have learned, in brief, that the Negro is a gift-bearer rather than a gift-receiver, as we have too long considered him.

In light of almost insurmountable social, political, and industrial handicaps, the tremendous progress made by the Negro in industry, in education, in art and creative literature, in social and cultural life, in ethical and moral standards, in the past few years will always remain for me an inspiring thing. In literature, I have read the works of such Negro writers as Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Rudolph Fisher, Burghardt DuBois, Alain Locke, James Weldon Johnson, and I have developed a great admiration for them. I have heard Roland Hayes and Negro choruses sing, and I have a high opinion of the colored man as a creator and interpreter of music. I have read of the achievements of the Negro in science, in dramatics, in painting, and I have come to realize that he has a powerful intellect and distinct ability as an artist.

Accompanying this cultural advance, I have seen new conceptions develop as to the worth of the Negro among those who are well-informed. I have seen admiration where before there was only indifference or scorn. The better newspapers and magazines, in the wake of this cultural advance, have sought to mold public opinion toward a better understanding of the Negro, and among the educated classes there has been a tendency toward liberalism in the treatment of the Negro, an acceptance of him on his intrinsic merits.

This new attitude has come about because of a new appreciation of the Negro's worth. Outstanding individuals have proved that we no longer can consider the Negro as a superstitious, ignorant, lustful degenerate who must have the fear of the lord and the white man put into him. There has been a new tendency to judge the Negro in the light of the best of the race rather than the worse, as heretofore. Even the poor whites on Southern farms and those transplanted to the cities are no longer flabbergasted when they hear a Negro lawyer, preacher, physician, or teacher.

Such has been my prosaic quest for understanding. I presume that my history can be duplicated by thousands of other people throughout the country who have learned not only to look charitably upon the black man but to admire him as well. If such can happen to us, largely without conscious educational efforts on the part of other people, why cannot well-planned educational methods succeed for other people? Why cannot well-intentioned people who may be in-