Ospedale Meyer for Children. It is built on the single pavilion plan, the pavilions being connected by a broad, glass-walled corridor. The service includes all branches, the infectious pavilions standing in a group by themselves on the large grounds. The operating-rooms and surgical dressing-rooms are well planned, and are in conformity with the requirements of a strict asepsis.

Besides steam sterilisation they prepare dry, sterile absorbent cotton in a way that was new to me. They use a large, double iron pan, something like a big waffle-iron, but smooth. The cotton layers go in this and the cover clamps down, and the cotton is baked to a light brown colour. There are fine clinical and pathological laboratories, rooms for microscopy, photography, and bacteriological work in this hospital. They have X-rays, and a well-fitted-up gymnasium for orthopædic cases, with appliances for passive and active exercises. They use the Lorenz method a great deal, with excellent results.

The pavilions for infections are simple and well planned. Patients, clothing, and attendants go in at one side and come out clean and disinfected by regular stages at the opposite end.

Through Miss Turton's kindness I saw this hospital under the guidance of the resident physicians, young men whose extreme courtesy and enthusiasm in their work made the visit especially delightful.

The housekeeping side of this hospital was also very attractive. The kitchen is a fascinating one, clean and shining, with all manner of quaint devices in brass and copper and wrought-iron. The linen of the house was beautiful, the doctors' white gowns even having embroidered initials worked by the nuns, and in the wards when the children were having their lunch I noticed a diet that seemed to me highly commendable—namely, broth with a fresh raw egg stirred into it just before taking.

I did not succeed in getting to the Obstetrical Hospital, which is said to be so admirable.

Florence is full of mediæval nursing history. The old hospital mentioned in "Romola," where Romola used to go to visit her patients, is still standing, but now converted into the Accademia di Belle Arti.

Among its pictures is a quaint representation of the two medical saints, Damian and Cosmas, setting a broken leg, and on one of the walls is a fresco showing hospital scenes in the same building in the fifteenth century. This fresco is now covered by a painting, which the guard will move on request.

According to these old frescoes, the Italian hospitals of the middle ages at least gave their patients a bed each, being superior in this respect to the old French hospitals, with three or four patients in one bed. Damian belonged to the Medici family (Medici—physician), and no one can be in Florence without becoming familiar with the Medici coat-of-arms, with its six huge pills on the shield.

Another historical spot is the Bigallo, on the Cathedral Square, a beautiful, open loggia where abandoned babies used to be laid. Next to it is a building occupied by a religious order whose work it was to take the foundlings left in the Bigallo.

Then one sees to this day the Brothers of the Misericordia going through the streets, dressed in black with a black mask over the face. In Rome they wear white. They were instituted as a sort of "First Aid" service, and really constituted a substitute for an ambulance corps. In the histories of mediæval Florence they are spoken of as if young men living at home took turns in responding to calls for this service, their duties being to carry the sick to hospital, to transport the bodies of the dead, and the like. They are also still sent for, I am told, in private cases to *turn* or *lift* the sick! In Florence we met a flock of them, taking a dead body for interment, all dressed in black with only their eyes showing. At night, carrying torches, they are even more weird-looking. In olden times the monks kept open house in hospices at the various city gates. The sick and wounded falling by the wayside were brought to them and tended by the monks until the Brothers of the Misericordia could be called to carry them to the hospitals within the city.

Before leaving Florence, do just look in at the drug-house of Molteni and Co., on the Piazza Signoria, and see the beautiful old majolica urns in which the drugs are kept. They are a perfect picture, standing in rows up to the ceiling.

In Rome I saw another interesting relic of mediæval hospital custom in the works of the Third Order of St. Francis.

Going through the hospital La Consolazione one day with Miss Sara MacDonald we came to a women's ward. The usual "infirmière," or nurse-servant, was sweeping the tiled floor with wet sawdust, and the nun in charge, with sweet, serene face, was knitting as she moved about surveying the ward (although it was the morning hour, when there is much work to be done), when to our surprise our eyes fell upon a lady, evidently, with her hat on, but enveloped in a big surgeon's apron, who was most busily and energetically at work over a patient. She bathed her face, neck, and hands (there are no screens in Italian hospitals, so everything can be seen), combed and arranged her hair, brushed out the bed, and carried off the basin of water to the lavatory.

With American curiosity we asked the Sister if this was a relation of the sick woman, thinking this might be a solution of how the patients are done up, which is a mystery. The Sister said No, she was a lady who came to do these things for the patients.

The lady, now being through her task, appeared divested of her apron, and was joined by another. Our curiosity now became too strong, and, as foreigners are allowed all sorts of liberties, we

previous page next page