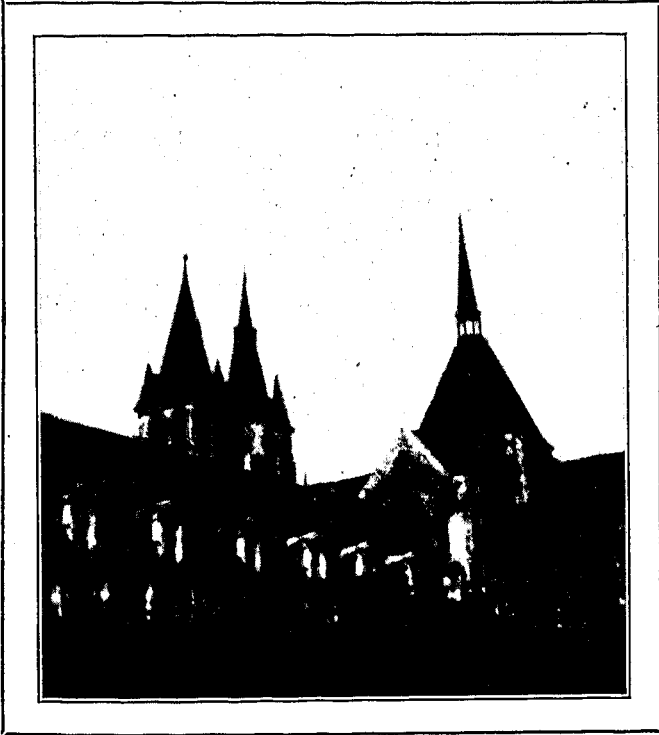


HÔPITAL CIVIL ET MILITAIRE, BLOIS.

By EUPHEMIA TORRY.

King Stephen of England was Stephen of Blois. His half-brother, Henry of Blois, Bishop of Winchester, founded the "Hospital of S. Cross," and is buried in Winchester Cathedral.



COURTYARD OF THE HOPITAL AT BLOIS.
Spires of St. Nicholas behind.

During this period when the two countries were so closely connected, there was founded in Blois a Benedictine Abbey dedicated to S. Laumer, though, curiously enough, the Abbey Church is named for S. Nicholas. As at S. Cross the main part of the Church is in Norman style, though, like its English sister, S. Nicholas has some later additions. The Abbey buildings have been less fortunate from the point of view of the archaeologist, for they were largely rebuilt in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Perhaps, from the point of view of hygiene, this is just as well, for the buildings are now used as a civil and military hospital.

The hospital has a most dignified appearance and a beautiful situation. The grey stone buildings form three courts planted

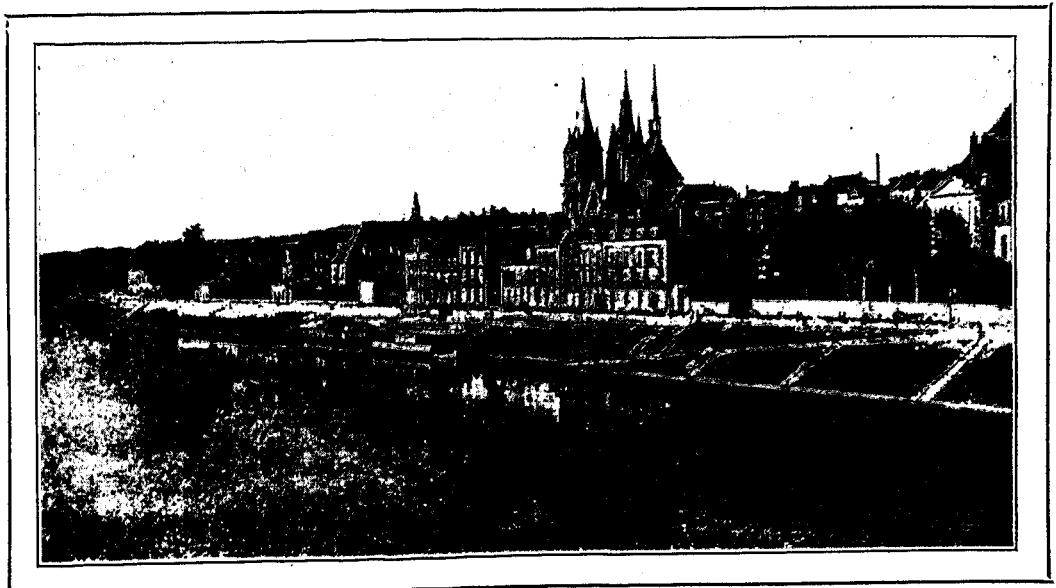
with trees and flowers, and open, except for an iron grille, on the road which runs along the river Loire. Behind are more courts enclosed on the far side by the Church of S. Nicholas or by other buildings. Except for the Church bells "which one gets accustomed to," I gathered that these interior courts were exceptionally quiet, for no sound from the outside world penetrates there.

It is not the easiest thing in the world to inspect a French religious hospital. In the case of completely civil institutions, one can get an order from the Prefecture or other competent authority without too much difficulty. But I have not yet discovered which is the competent authority in the case of institutions staffed by "religious," neither is it easy to know beforehand where to expect "civil" and where "religious" organisation.

The Hotel Dieu in Paris, for instance, is historically an ancient religious foundation. Yet now it is purely secular and permission to inspect must be sought at the *administration generale de l'Assistance Publique*. At Angers, another historically religious house called "Hotel Dieu ou Hospice Sainte Marie," the sisters of St. Vincent de Paul still work, but they are outnumbered by lay helpers, and it was a lay secretary who arranged my visit. In Blois, where "Civil and Military Hospital" is writ large over the doorway, only nuns (*Sœurs de la Sagesse*) were to be seen. They were even doing the secretarial work. My time in Blois was, unfortunately, very restricted, so I gave the vexed question of permits and introductions a miss, and went boldly into the precincts asking if I might look round.

The office was just inside the entrance of the most westerly court, and the nun who was busy over her books sent out another nun to speak to me. My request seemed the first of its kind and worried her considerably. What exactly did I want to know? Unfortunately, I replied that I was specially interested in women's careers, for instance, the training of nursing sisters and conditions of their work. The little nun drew herself up with dignity, "Our training is for several years but we are religious sisters and the details of our training and of our lives are entirely secret." It wasn't a promising opening, but, after a little desultory conversation on other lines, she decided to ask a superior to see me.

Fortunately this sister-in-charge had spent some years in England and we also discovered that we had both been



THE HOSPITAL BUILDINGS ARE THOSE FRONTING THE RIVER.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)