

SANTAREM HOSPITAL.

By MISS EUPHEMIA TORRY.

Santarem is in one of the most fertile parts of Portugal, the valley of the Tagus, but the town itself stands on a hill in a bend of the river. The view from the extreme point of the hill, once a fortress, now a public garden, is famous, and the good folk of Santarem have done honour to it by planting the approaching avenue with Judas trees, their pink blossom a dream of beauty in the spring.

On the same level as this garden, but 20 minutes' walk from it, stands the hospital. This three-storeyed white building surrounds a good sized garden, round which is an arcaded walk like a cloister. The doctor in charge was not any too anxious to let me go round and I had to produce a general authorisation which I had secured in Lisbon, but which I never used if it could be avoided. Then to do him justice, he gave way with a very good grace and fetched a charming young married woman from the pharmacy to act as my guide.

No wonder they did not want a foreign visitor. The place was so full of contrasts. Some of the staff obviously knew how things ought to be and others did not care. I soon placed my doctor among the former and guessed that he did not wish me to see the works of the latter.

The kitchens, for instance, opening off the arcaded walk were a complete mess, and near them was an equally messy men's ward in two sections with doors open between. There was a huge spittoon in the middle, the beds were untidy and each patient had masses of visitors, including children who sprawled about on the floor.

A complete contrast was the pharmacy, also opening off the cloister. This was spotlessly clean and as neat as a new pin. The outer room was lined with shelves on which stood stores of bottles. In the centre was a table for distributing the finished medicines. The actual dispensing was done in the inner room into which I could only glance, but that, too, was as neat and tidy as could be. The pharmacy was staffed by three practising pharmacists and one assistant. My guide was the analyst and took me also to another laboratory in a new small building in a garden at the back. This also was spick and span. In a small back room was a guinea pig which had been inoculated. My guide told me that she mainly did clinical analyses,

but also a little "industrial work." At this end of the estate was a new mortuary, which I did not inspect, and, at a short distance, a tuberculosis pavilion which had lately been inaugurated with some ceremony, but could not be used because the available money had all been used to build it and there was none left for furnishing.

We returned to the main building and went up two flights of stairs to the women's wards. One of these was quite ordinary, with beds facing the centre, where there was that almost inevitable furnishing of a Portuguese ward, a table covered with bottles. But the other ward would have been noticeable for its excellent appearance in any hospital anywhere. The table and bottles were replaced by stands containing graceful green plants. Elsewhere were well-arranged bowls of lovely flowers. All the patients, even a pretty child of five, had white handkerchiefs folded over their heads. All the beds were tidy with clean white covers.

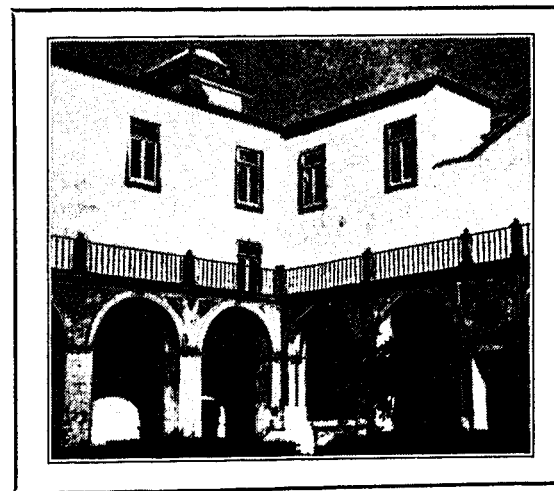
I cannot explain why one ward should be so different from another, unless it is the personality of the nurse in charge. In a small room near the two women's wards I met a nurse who looked exactly as if she might be responsible for the pretty ward. She wore a white overall covering her from neck to ankles, so I could not tell whether she wore uniform beneath it. She was setting down a bowl of flowers, presumably having taken them out of the ward for the night, for this room was equipped with a table and leg rests for obstetrical examinations. There

was also a glass-fronted cupboard with instruments.

Our next visit was to a sadder ward, kept for abortion cases, or rather, for attempting to set right the results of bad abortions. Here were six beds, four of them occupied. My guide confirmed what had been told me by the head of a maternity hospital in Lisbon, that the practice was appallingly current in Portugal and that doctors were doing all they could to persuade people against it. But the fact remains that practically every hospital (at least those I saw) had special wards for abortion cases. One of these patients looked much too old for such a tragedy. We descended one flight to the first floor, where there was one men's ward and the operating theatre. Here we found the doctor, and here again everything was most spick and span, so that I had a moment's suspicion that he had been here tidying up while I was going round. But perhaps I malign him, since other parts of the hospital on which I had come unawares



The Offices of the Misericórdia containing a portrait of Queen Leonora de Lencastre.



Colonnade, Santarem Hospital, Portugal.

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