

A NEW ERA FOR PORTO RICO'S LEPER COLONY

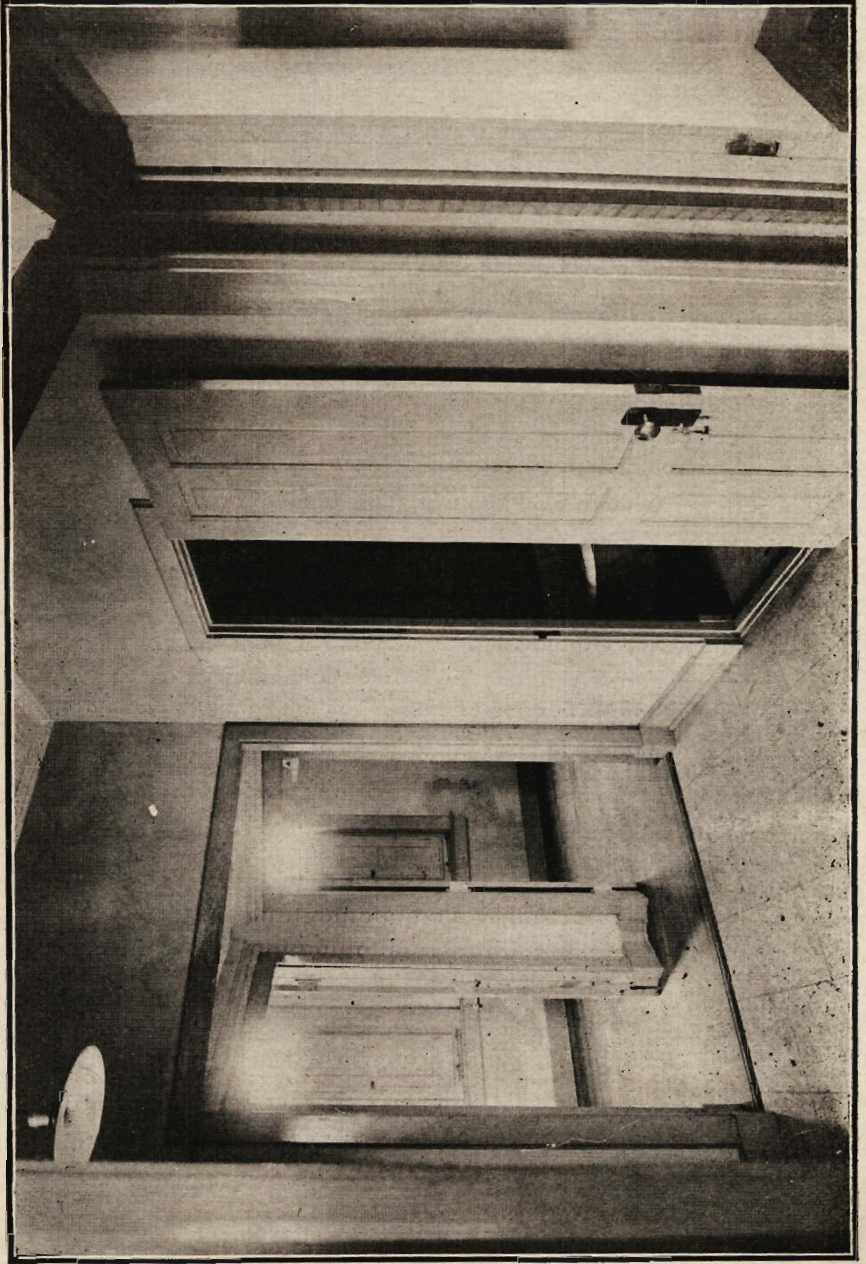
There are comparatively few lepers in Porto Rico, forty-four being the number isolated at the present time. In 1920, when Dr. Pedro N. Ortiz, present Commissioner of Health, was in charge of the Leper Colony, a small amount of the derivatives of chalmougra oil was obtained from Hawaii, due to the generosity of Dr. J. T. McDonald, and as a result the patients began to receive the new treatment in June of 1921.

According to an extract taken from the Annual Report of the Department of Health for 1921 the results of this treatment were summarized as follows:

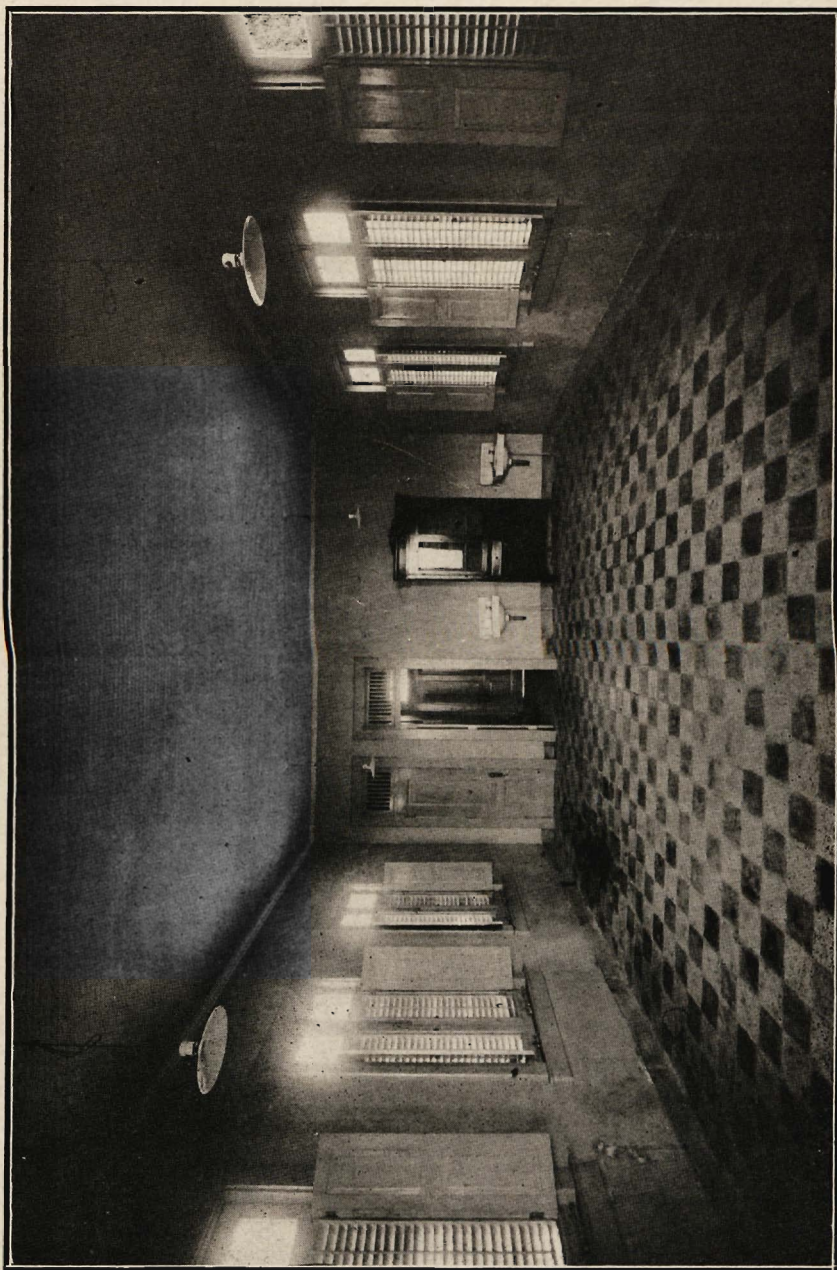
"Sixteen patients have improved remarkably, and of these, three recently admitted are in a highly satisfactory state of health. In all, the following favorable changes have been noted: increased weight, easy respiration, good color, absorption of the subcutaneous nodules, disappearance of the thickness of the skin which contributes to forming the characteristic leonine face of the lepers, falling off 'en masse' of exuberant lepromas, under which the skin appears smooth and soft though with less pigment, this being especially marked in the patients of the colored race. The skin which has covered subcutaneous nodules where the Hansen bacillus has been working for years against the biological laws of nature, remains flaccid and hanging, has lost its tone, and this constitutes one of the permanent marks of the disease. In young adults and in children, when the disease in its beginning and after a long period of incubation commences to show itself in red macules, in pigmental areas, in slight cellular hypertrophies richly supplied with small vessels, situated principally on the lobules of the ears, on the sides of the nose or on the pomules, when the obstruction of the nasal fosae requires the intervention of a specialist, this is the time when the active principle of this new series of fatty acids with their ethyl-esters, hidden in the chemical structure of a five-carbon ring, has an energetic and specific action upon the bacillus of leprosy. Two children and one adult admitted in the above-described condition are entirely free from every external lesion, the skin and affected tissues having recovered their normal appearance."

Later on still greater advances were made in the study and treatment of the disease and in the Annual Report of the Department of Health for 1923 Dr. Ortiz makes the following encouraging statement:

"Since the derivatives of chalmougra oil have come into use as a specific for leprosy new interest has been aroused in the treatment of this malady all over the world. Porto Rico has contributed its share in behalf of the progressive evolution of this remedy. Since June 1921 we have been using the ethyl-esters of chalmougra oil among our lepers and the results have been so encouraging



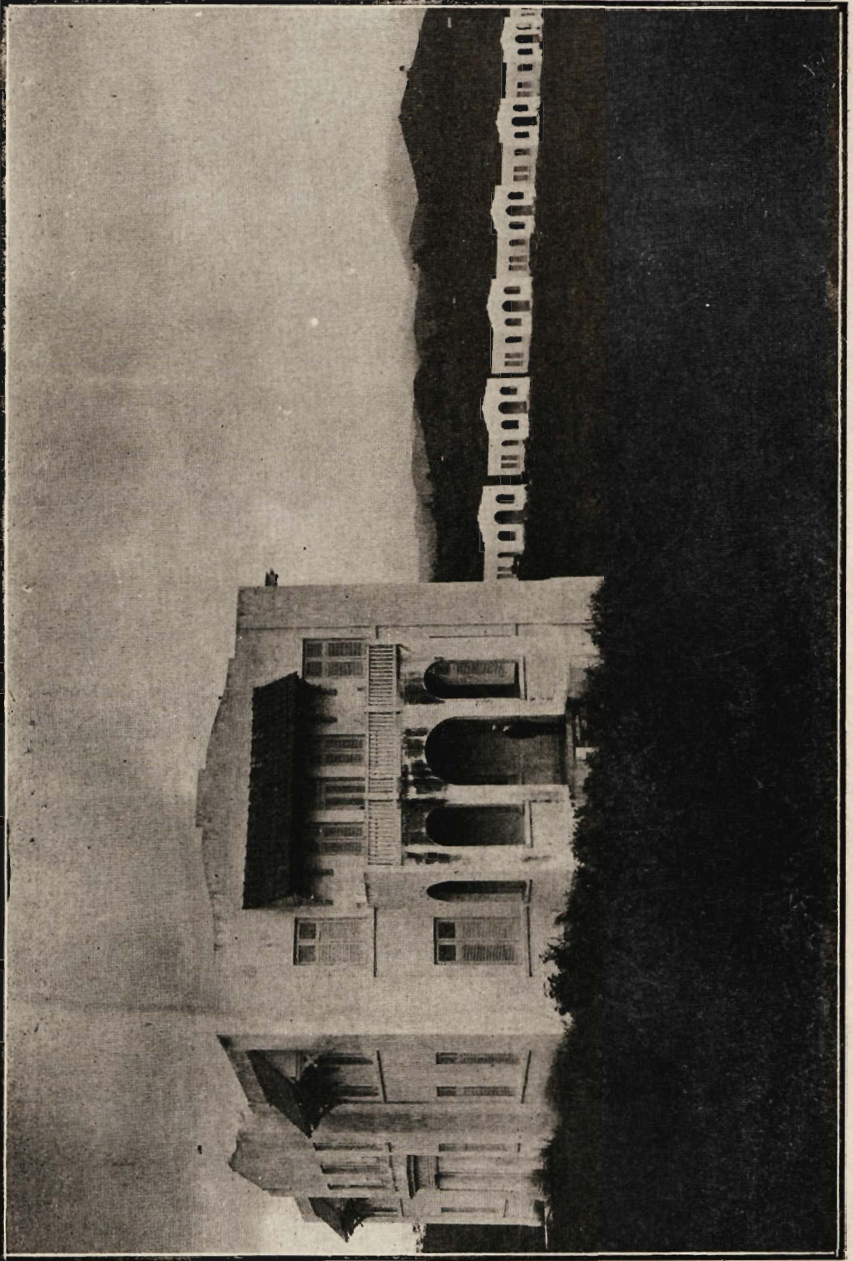
Interior View of a Cottage, New Leper Hospital.



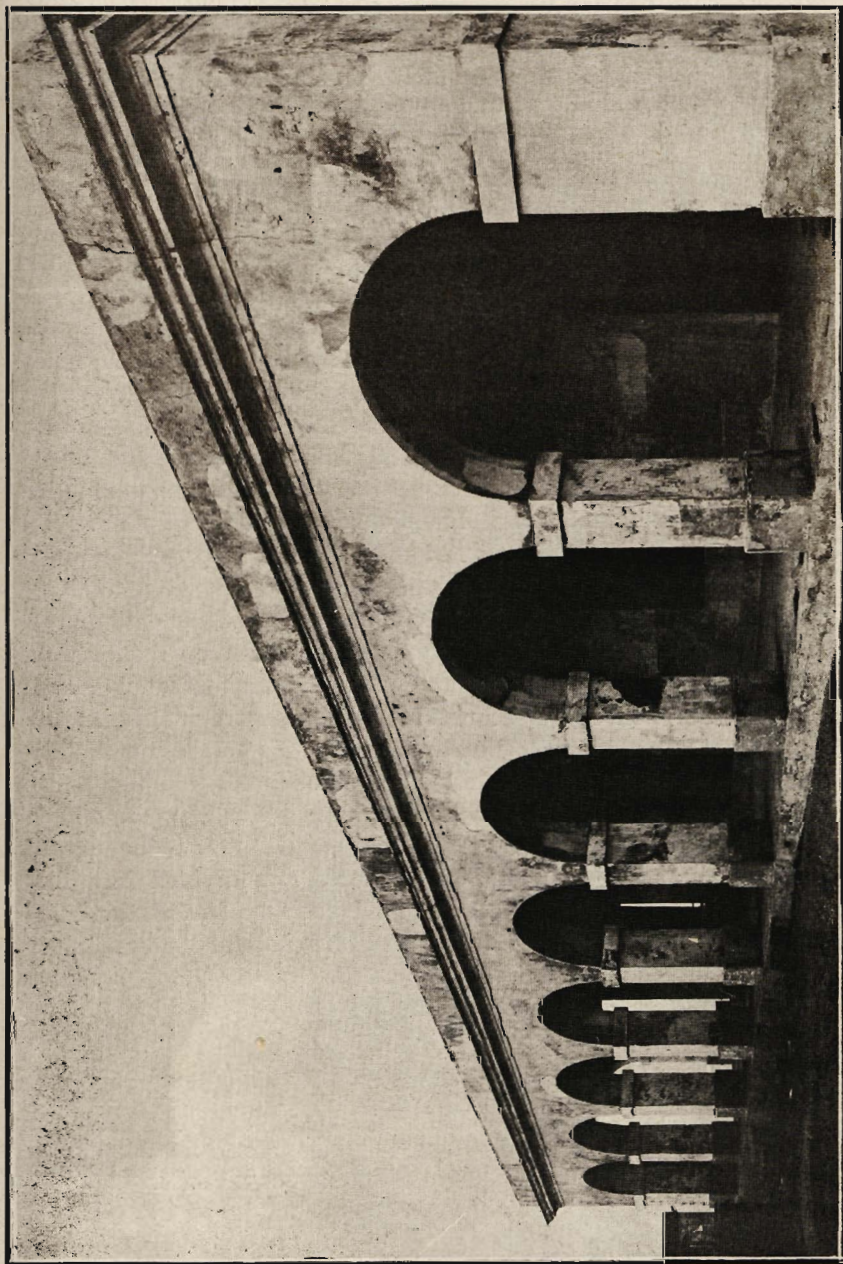
Interior of a Dining Room.



Cottage with Four Rooms, Sanitary Installation and Closets for Four Patients.



Administration Building and Women's Quarters at the New Hospital.



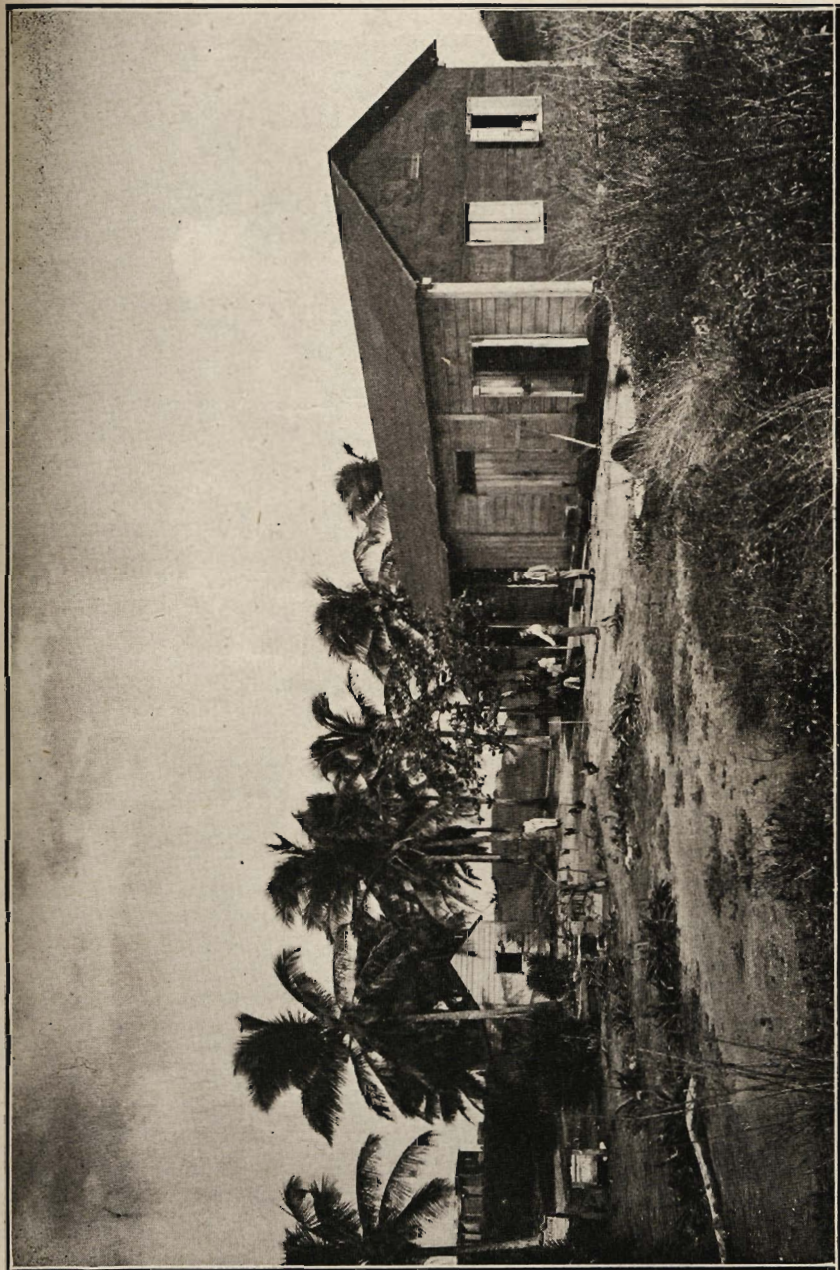
Men's Quarters, Old Leper Colony.

that we expect to parole in the near future some patients whose disease seems to be arrested. Up to the time I took charge of the department of health I was in charge of all the patients isolated at the insular leprosarium. My study of this repulsive disease led me after many trials and thorough consideration to do away with the standard intra-muscular treatment adopted in Hawaii, to be replaced by the intravenous method which renders the administration of the remedy practically painless, doing away with the danger of deep abscess formation as is the case with the old method, which hinders some patients from receiving the full benefit of an uninterrupted medication."

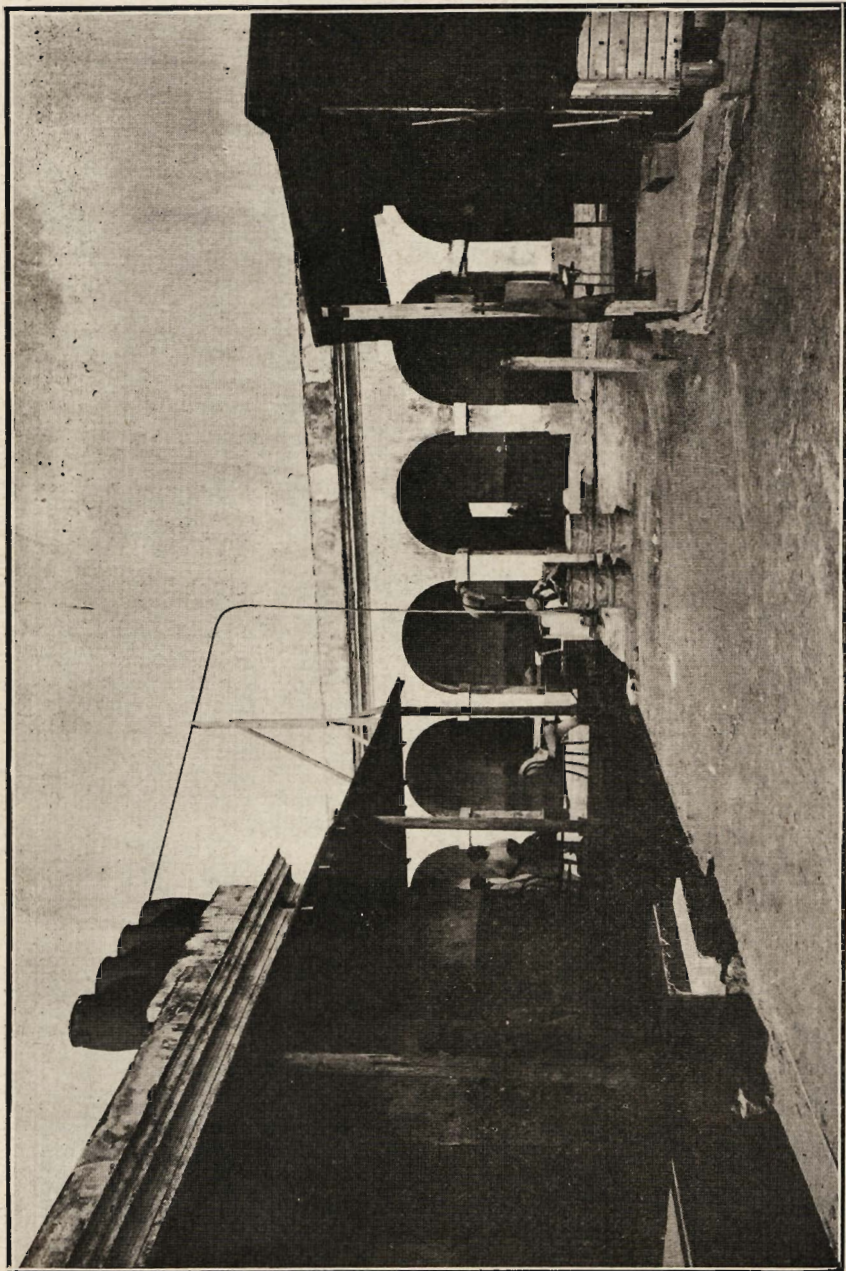
At the present time the leper colony is situated on a desolate little island at the entrance of San Juan harbor. It is a barren spot, swept by damp sea breezes saturated with sodium chloride. The adverse conditions which make life unbearable at Cabras Island made imperative the construction of a new hospital, and as a result of the arduous efforts put forth by Governor Horace Mann Towner in behalf of these patients the Insular Legislature appropriated a sum of money for a new leprosarium. Forty-two acres of land were secured near San Juan in a fertile plateau surrounded by beautiful scenery, and this environment alone will no doubt improve the moral and physical condition of the inmates.

This new leprosarium costing \$125,000 is now ready for occupancy. It is planned to accommodate sixty patients and very soon Cabras Island will no longer be the home of the lepers. Isolated in this new place they will enjoy the natural gifts of a tropical landscape. A park is laid out in the centre of the grounds to the rear of the administration building, and cottages, club rooms, dining rooms, clinical and surgical wards have been erected. The patients will be separated according to sex and the employees will have their quarters in the administration building. Each cottage is divided into four single rooms with individual closets and sanitary installations.

The transfer of the leper colony to this beautiful leprosarium so carefully planned will mark a new era in their life and will be a source of gratification to every citizen of Porto Rico.



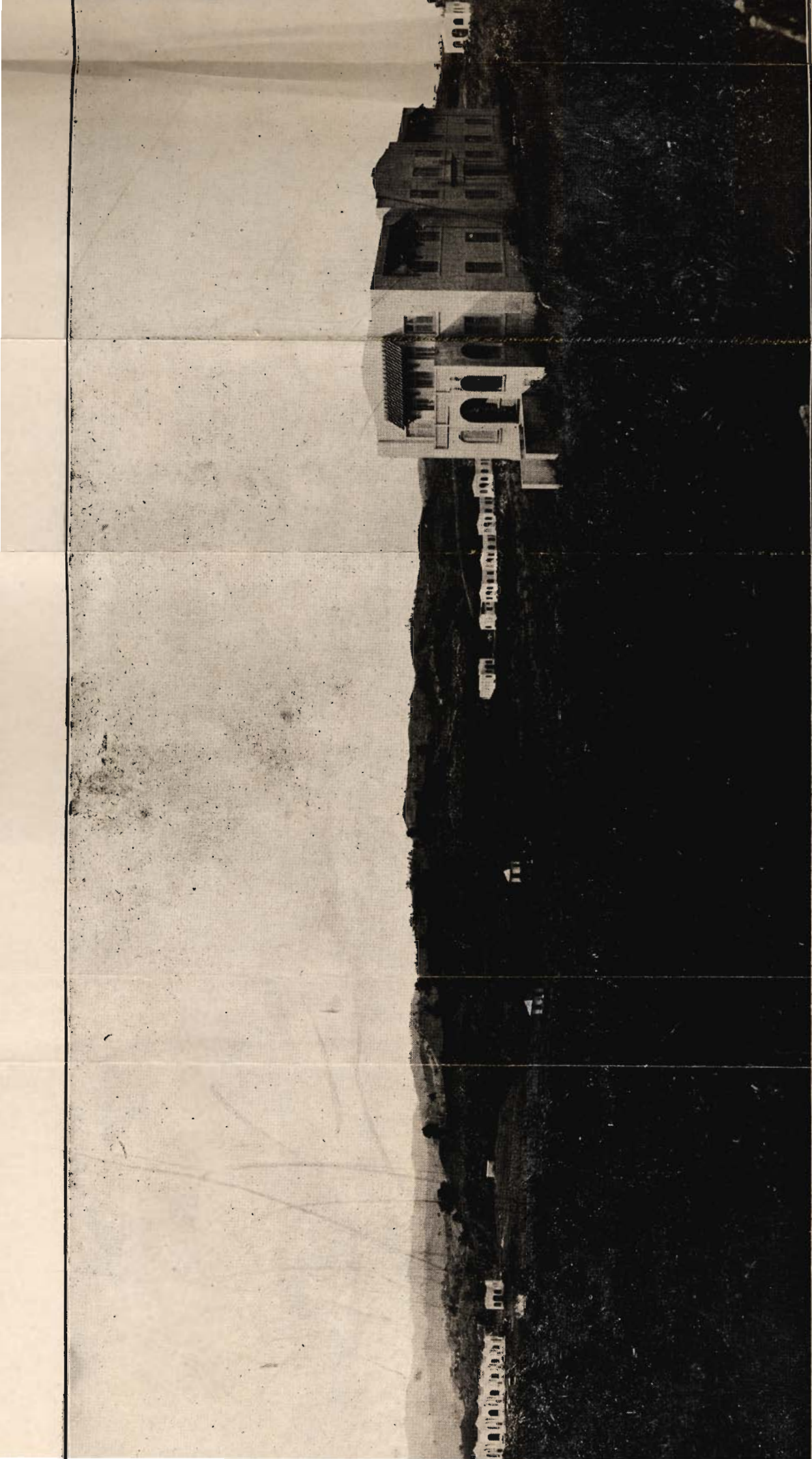
Administration Building, Old Leper Colony.



Water-Supply System in the Old Colony. (The new Hospital has complete water-supply and sewerage systems.)



Women's Quarters, Old Leper Colony.



Panoramic View of New Leper Hospital, Barrio "Las Cuevas", Trujillo Alto

by the work