

OUR BUREAU OF SOCIAL WELFARE

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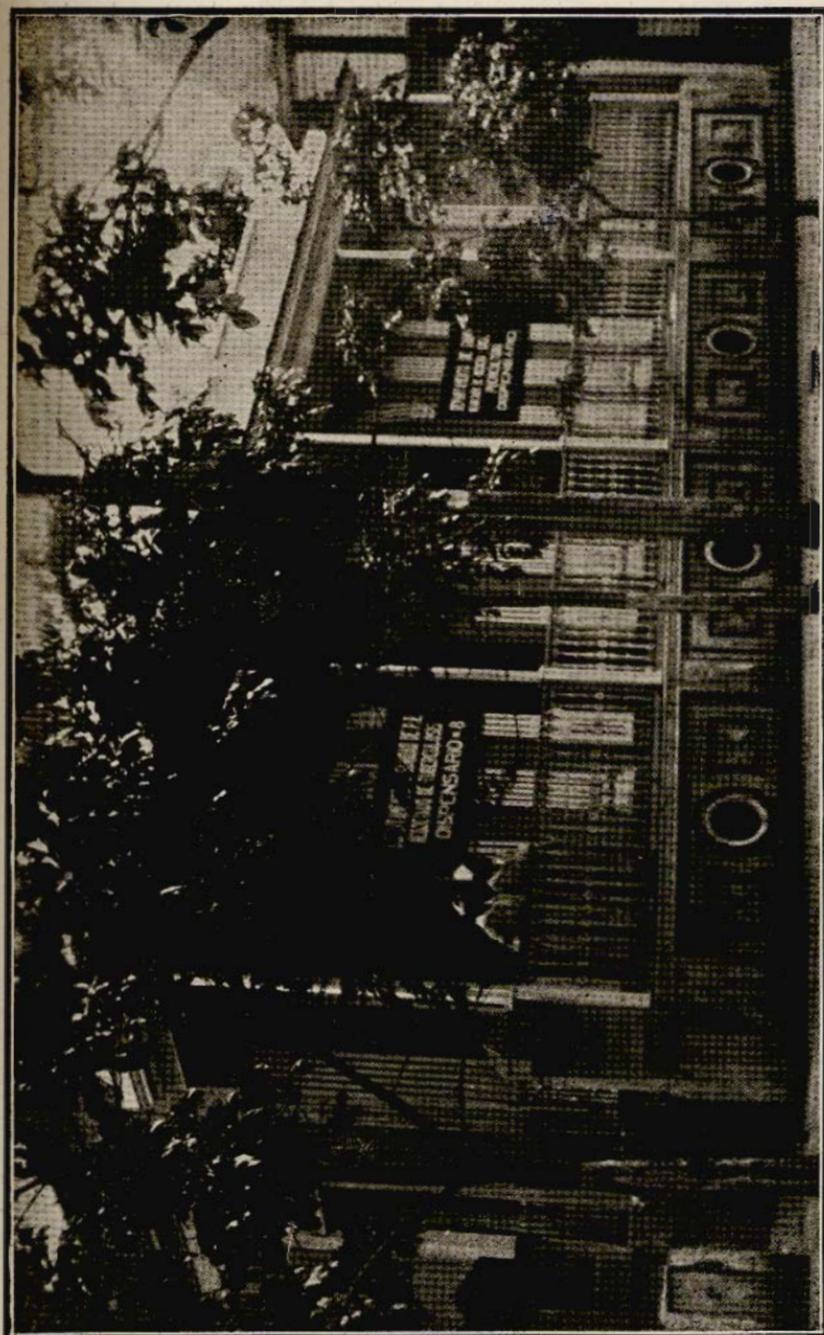
The Department of Health of Porto Rico is a powerfully centralized institution. This centralization has brought about greater unity of action, more discipline and higher efficiency than is possible in most public-health organizations throughout the United States. The size of the Island and the excellent system of roads make possible a centralized arrangement which would be impracticable in a large country or in a small territory with poor roads.

For the past four years, under the leadership of Dr. Pedro N. Ortiz, present Commissioner of Health, many remarkable improvements have been brought about in the organization of the Department of Health, with a view to raising its standard to a point where it can be favorably compared with the best institutions of its type in the world. New services have been offered to the public, old services have been reorganized, and a breath of progress and enthusiasm has been instilled into everything, so that at the present time we feel proud of our position, not inferior to that of any other institution of a similar nature.

Not the least important, among the latest changes introduced in the organization of the Department of Health has been the creation of the new "Bureau of Social Medicine", brought about by the consolidation of the services of Maternity and Child Welfare, Tuberculosis, Venereal Diseases and the divisions of Social Welfare and Public-Health Nursing. By uniting these services we have been able to obtain greater cooperation and efficiency from all the agencies which deal with medical social problems, and we have given a definite trend to our endeavors along these lines, achieving at the same time greater economy in the work.

The activities of the Bureau of Social Medicine pivot around a system of dispensaries, thirty of which are already functioning in different parts of the Island. Twelve of these dispensaries devote their activities to the prevention of tuberculosis, fifteen have to do with the reduction of maternal and infantile mortality and three give their attention to the incidence of venereal diseases.

Attached to these dispensaries, there are thirty-six visiting nurses,



Exterior View of the Dispensary at Mayaguez, P. R.

under one "Superintendent of the Nursing Service", who is an experienced public-health nurse. The services of twenty-five doctors have been secured for the dispensaries. A few of these doctors devote their full time to the work. Most of them work part time, but all of them are paid for their services, our view in this respect being that it is much easier to secure proper discipline and efficiency from paid officials than from those who lend their services free of charge.

The work of the dispensaries receives further enhancement from the Division of Social Work, under the direction of a "Superintendent of Social Work", who is an experienced social worker, a graduate from one of the best schools of Social Welfare in the United States.

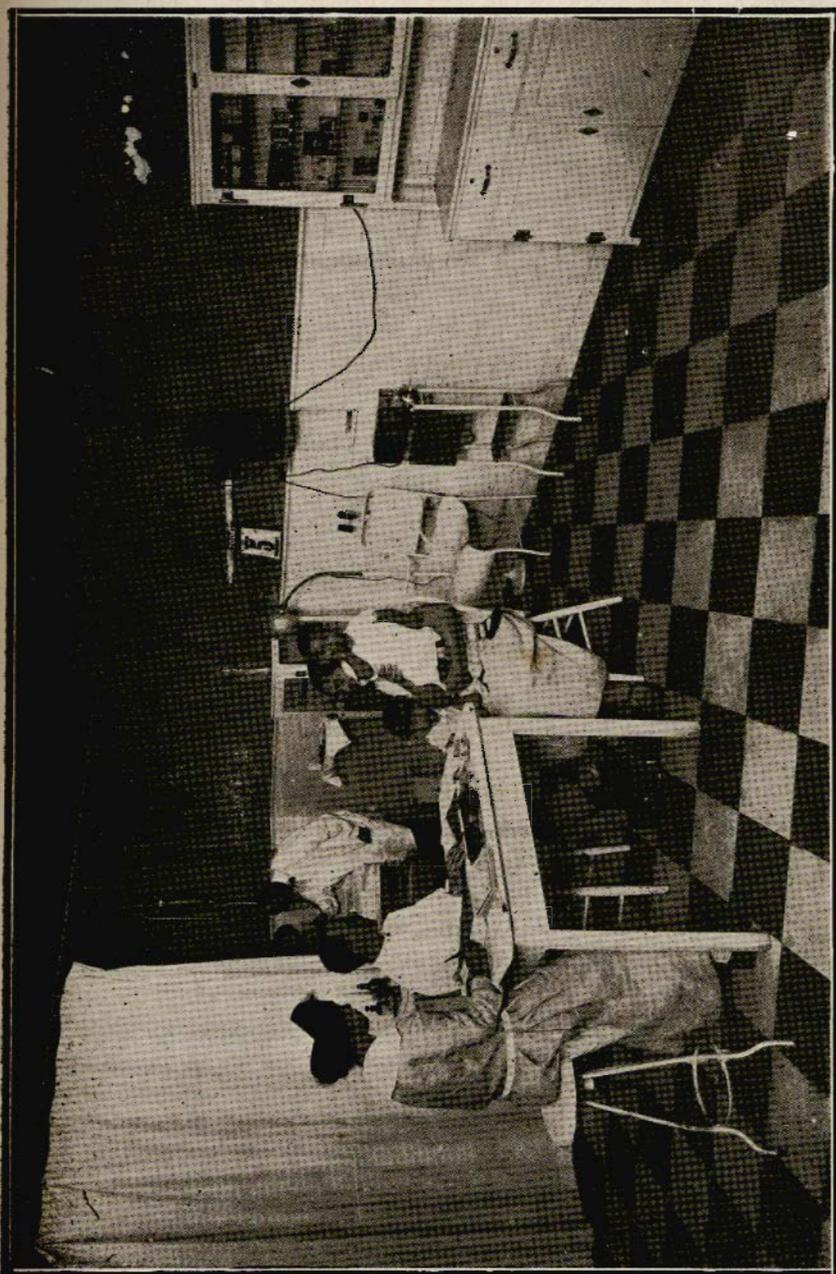
During the past fiscal year, 1,314 cases were attended to by the Division of Social Work; 67,502 visits were made by the visiting nurses to the homes of dispensary patients, and 65,300 consultations were held by doctors in the dispensaries.

The character of the work has been mainly educational. We have striven to help the people by teaching them to help themselves. We have instructed them on fundamental principles of hygiene, and have endeavored to solve their most pressing problems by the best means at our command. In many cases we have received some cooperation from the municipal governments, but not enough to satisfy us. There must be a clearer understanding in this respect.

The great handicap, however, has been the lack of resources to extend our services to every corner of the Island. The importance of this work is so great, that no municipality, however small or unimportant, should be deprived of it. This needs, however, the enrolling of a plan whereby a larger proportion of the expenses incurred be met by the municipal governments. It also needs the working out of a system of travelling clinics. An experiment in the latter system will be tried this year, and, if it gives the expected results it may lead to the working out of a larger plan whereby the rural districts may receive the full benefit of our work.

A diphtheria-prevention campaign is being carried on now through our dispensaries. The Shick test is being applied to all the children who attend the child-welfare clinics and toxin-antitoxin immunization is being given to those who are susceptible to diphtheric infection. In those towns where there is not a school physician, children attending the first grade in the public schools are also being immunized.

It is a very difficult matter to estimate in round figures the practical results of any educational campaign along public-health lines; yet we know that our dispensaries have already succeeded in training



Examining Room in a Child-Welfare Center

thousands of poor mothers in the care of themselves and their children, and that many lives of infants have been saved because of the training thus received by their mothers.

The way to prevent tuberculosis and venereal diseases has been taught to many. "Little Mother's Leagues" and "Nutrition Classes" have been organized among school children, and thus have helped to prepare healthy and helpful future citizens.

We feel confident that the public mind has been aroused in many parts of the Island to the benefits that accrue from a well-organized educational campaign in public-health matters, and that the need of more public-health dispensaries has been already seen and felt. We have introduced the *visiting nurse* and the *social worker* as important factors in the social development of the community and have impressed the public with the importance of their work and the desirability of extending their fields of activity.

In view of the fact that this work began only four years ago the results obtained thus far have been most satisfactory. Without doubt the Bureau of Social Medicine of the Department of Health is destined to play an important part in the future welfare of Porto Rico.

