

THROUGH GRAMERCY PARK

BY HELEN THOBURN (Mu)

"In the heart of New York City, 'mid its noisy, crowded ways," stands a school which has its like nowhere in the country, or in the world, a school of which most Gamma Phis never heard but which has always had one or more Gamma Phi representatives and where there have already, in the two years of its existence, been many Gamma Phi reunions. Josephine Stone, Zeta, could tell you all about its first year if you looked her up in the Los Angeles Young Women's Christian Association; Mary Beiler, Delta, and Helen Salisbury, Mu, will have much to say of the 1910 class as they travel far and wide; and for the first two years at least there was a Gamma Phi on the staff.

Next time you're in New York, hunt up quaint old Gramercy Park, tucked in between 20th and 21st Streets, in the shadow of the Metropolitan Tower, and if you dared give the frat whistle in front of the dignified step of number three, I think there's almost always someone, provided it's school time, to come back at you with "Yes, my dear, I am here." Whoever this is will take you to a room that flaunts the familiar brown and mode pennant, but will assure you that it's not a New York chapter house, but—and here she will take a long breath—"the National Training School of the National Board of the Young Women's Christian Associations." Then of course you're no wiser than you were before, so I shall have to explain it all, and it may be technical but please read it anyway, especially if you're a senior and wondering what's going to happen to you after June, 1911.

Doctors, lawyers, and I suppose even Indian chiefs, are all taking from an extra year to four years of study after college to prepare for their work. Why not Young Women's Christian Association secretaries? The day when people stumbled into this and similar work because they weren't equipped for teaching and "just loved girls" is over. So very much worth while has the association secretaryship become, so seriously does it demand expert training and

knowledge, that the national board, at its headquarters in New York, conceived the plan of a training system which shall recruit the star girls from our colleges and after a three months' preliminary course in a training center, and more or less time spent for its application in a local association, turn them toward the year's course in a national training school equipped and financed by the national organization. From the four corners of the country they have come,



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even from Great Britain, Bulgaria, Mexico and India, about fifteen girls each of the first two years and thirty this third year, to find among other things that the college graduate doesn't necessarily know anything at all, and that the dearest kind of fun and fellowship doesn't necessarily stop with one's Commencement Day. Like the pillar of the country town who said, "All that there is I am, what I am not, ain't," there is quite literally, nothing which the association secretary may not study to advantage! Though they

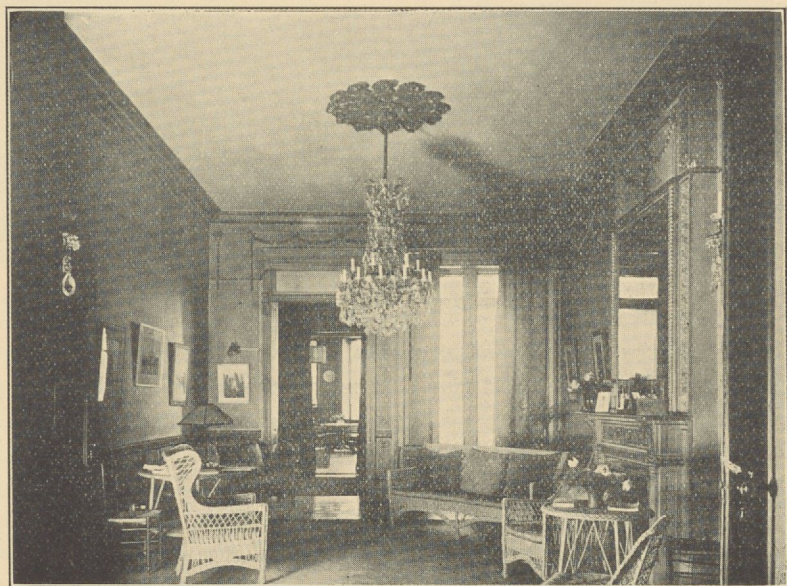
don't smatter, at the N. T. S., Helen Salisbury gives an idea of what they do learn in one of her class songs,

"We have learned of 'current movements' and of everything that's new,

We have learned to tell a story, we have learned the 'point of view.'"

It's downright exciting to be in the office and watch the schedule in the process of making, watch letters go out to the picked and chosen of the country, so many of whom are accessible in New York itself, and the replies come with a hearty assent, so interested are the thinkers and doers of the day in this newest development of social work. The kind of speakers for whom they excuse all classes and hold university assemblies once in three or four weeks, at college. figures daily on the program of this little school; and in Bible work, economics (much of which, incidentally, is done by affiliation at Columbia), public speaking, association method, hygiene, and especially that all-star course in current movements, this handful of girls is met by the specialists of the country.

"Visitation day," which comes about once in two weeks, may mean a trip to the Franco-American Factory in New Jersey, where the girls are met and conducted by a social secretary, are given a luncheon composed entirely of the products of the company, from consommé to plum-pudding, and are shown a plant which is model in equipment and wholesome working conditions. It may mean a few hours spent in the Colgate factory, where the management has given up an entire floor high up above the Hudson, for the caféteria, rest and recreation rooms of the hundreds of girls it employs, under the direction of a full-time secretary from the neighboring Young Women's Christian Association. It may mean a day at the State Reformatory at Bedford, up the river, a day of never-forgotten contact with girlhood rescued at its most pitiful depths and put into sane and educative channels for a year or more, until the wrecks of lives return to their normal possibilities. These are vivid experiences, that come back with illuminating force when one is out on the field working at definite problems. They help to make pos-

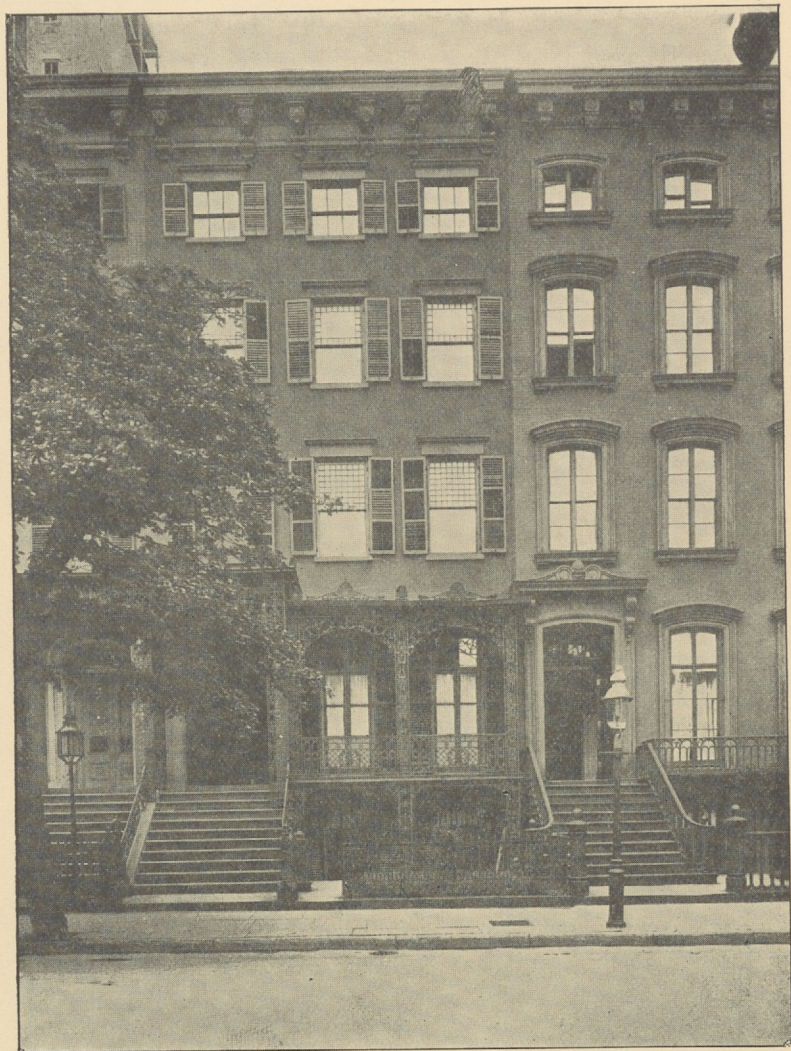


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sible the co-operation every secretary hopes to establish with the other welfare agencies of the town in which she takes up her work.

Then there are the distracting and never-ending possibilities opened up by just being in New York, aside from the course in itself. The symphony concert series, opera at a dollar in the seats "up where the really interesting people are," the plays that are worth while,—anyone who has ever been in New York knows how bewildering it is to get it all in. And there are the odd and unexpected things to do—the brass-shops down on the east side, the little tea-shops around 34th Street, the gray quiet of the great Catholic cathedral to slip into, just off the hum of Fifth Avenue's "passing show," a Staten Island ferry-ride by moonlight, when the wharves are covered with snow.

The serene way in which last year's class appropriated New York's facilities at commencement time, in lieu of the ordinary campus local color, was amusing. "Field day" meant a riotous trip to Coney Island, en masse; the next day being Baccalaureate Sunday, the class went in a body to a church of which they were particularly fond, where a block of seats was especially reserved for them. And on class night, just before the loving cup service (which in itself was so beautiful that I wish it might be used in Gamma Phi chapters) the inhabitants of the park threw up their windows and the passers in the street crowded against the iron bars of the park fence, to watch a circle of white-gowned girls form near the fountain deep in the recesses of the park, and to the singing of a chant written to the wonderful music of "Hail, Stanford, Hail," pass in grave procession toward the gate and the house, each bearing a lighted candle. To these outsiders it was doubtless an impressive puzzle; to those inside the gates it was a ceremony never to be forgotten, and in the coming years the "Alma Mater, we thy children, bear thy light afar," will stand to those girls for a year of close and beautiful comradeship, a year of unexcelled opportunity for development of the more abundant life, and above all, a year which imposed on each one of them a responsibility to bear "the light of the world" to all girlhood.



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