

Our American Letter.

(BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT).

THOSE members of the nursing sisterhood connected with the New York City Training School, on Blackwell's Island, whose love of the picturesque outruns their notions of what is convenient, must have watched with mingled feelings the disappearance of the old approach from the city to the ferry landing at Fifty-third Street, which was their only road from the Island to the outside world and back again.

No imagination, unassisted, could have pictured as belonging to one of the departments of a great city, such a crazily dilapidated arrangement as stood there for years.

At that point a high, rocky cliff ascends abruptly from the river, and to its face clung a rickety, tottering staircase, little more than a ladder in construction, making two turns and descending to a rude wooden shanty perched upon the smooth side of a rocky mass, from which again a rough and precipitous path led to the water side, where a small tug or a row-boat stood ready to take passengers back and forth between the city and the Island with its long row of charitable institutions.

By day this little journey was sufficiently perilous, and by night, with an accompaniment of wind and wave, and lights reflected up and down the river, it partook of the weird and uncommon in no small degree. An untimely landslide brought the day when the City Fathers decided to replace the cliff by a high stone wall, and the old ladder by a new staircase, no more beautiful than the old, and entirely lacking in every element which appeals to the imagination.

The life of the nurses on the Island has many picturesque features. The Training School was originally the old small-pox hospital, afterwards occupied by the sisters, and finally taken for a nurses' home.

Built of gray stone, in a semi-ecclesiastical style of architecture, and covered with vines, it looks unworldly, sequestered, and solemn. It stands at the extreme point of the island, and from its southern doors and windows one seems to be almost overhanging the river. In recent years it has been enlarged by the addition of the old maternity wards, which, with some alteration and a good deal of paint and renovation, now form dining rooms, kitchens, linen closets and store-rooms, the whole being connected with the Home by a corridor. The old Charity Hospital, overflowing with incurables and chronic cases, is not the only one in the care of the nurses: in addition they have service in the new Maternity—a large place—really a small hospital, built somewhat in the form of a star, with wards radiating from a centre; and in Harlem and Gouverneur Hospitals, both located in the city—one at the extreme north, the other far to the south, and on the river. In these hospitals acute cases are taken. As their accommodations are limited, only the head nurse and night nurses remain in them, and the day nurses travel to and fro, daily, to them, on the boats from the island.

The work of reformation accomplished by Miss Hurche and Miss Kimber, in the eight or nine years during which they have laboured on the island, would need a volume in the telling, and it is hardly likely

that its history will ever be written. In the Hospital Service, and in the School, their work, backed by a few ardent and influential women of the laity, has effected changes little short of marvellous to those who knew the conditions under which they began. The worst pictures of hospital horrors under the old-time nursing could hardly be too highly coloured to illustrate the state of the wards in Charity when they took charge, while the peculiar and unceasing difficulty of their position lay in the defensive and unyielding attitude which they were obliged to maintain against the encroachments and hostilities of political elements. Could the story of their lives and their work be told it would put them on a plane with Agnes Jones and other shining examples of nursing heroism. But they will never write it, and no one else can.

The movement toward a three years' course grows steadily. Almost every month one hears of another hospital establishing it, and, as with the medical schools under similar circumstances, it is not found that the supply of desirable applicants is lessened by the prospect of another year's training.

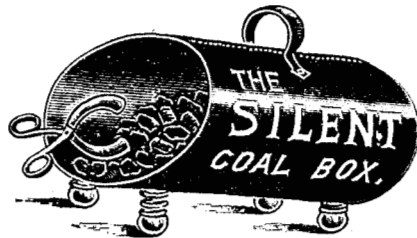
Over the whole country, too, the work of organization is spreading steadily, and nurses seem to be more and more animated by the conviction that, united, they can wield influence and accomplish many things.

Nothing could be more satisfactory than the daily increasing tendency to strengthen the bonds of the Alumnae Associations, and to extend their functions. These local bodies, strong and full of purpose, are indispensable in the development of a national union, and this truth seems to be fully realised on all sides.

Inventions.

"THE SILENT COAL BOX."

ANYONE who has ever been ill, knows how irritating it is to hear the grating of coals as they are chased and coaxed out of an ordinary coal-box, which might have been specially designed for its resounding and disturbing properties. Messrs. Reynolds and Branson, of Leeds, have now produced a really "Silent



Coal Box" for sick rooms. It is made of almost indestructible material, and will not wear out like the tin sheath of the ordinary coal-box. In cases of serious illness, one of these utensils should be looked upon as an essential requisite; and not only is the price very moderate, but we are informed that Messrs. Reynolds and Branson are prepared to lend these "Silent Coal Boxes" on hire at a small charge per week or month.

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