

THE GUILD OF THE NEEDLE AND BOBBIN CRAFTS

BY GERTRUDE WHITING

AS stated in the June letter sent to all club members, there are many of our foreign women who cannot take regular positions on account of their many children; but through this country's labor-saving devices, have spare time on their hands and during that time are growing discontented. This seems to be the Club's opportunity to step in and do a doubly good work—enlisting the women's interest and attention and making available the embroidery and weaving they learned as children in their native lands.

"The City Where Crime is Play," a pamphlet issued some time ago by the People's Institute, states so much of what the committee feels that I shall not hesitate to quote from it, especially as the People's Institute through Mrs. Howard Mansfield and Miss Cora McDowell brought this opportunity to the attention of the Needle and Bobbin Club.

This whole article could be filled with examples from the ill-explored, neglected art life of the immigrant—examples which would show the immigrant to be a tragically human problem, and a thoroughly hopeful civic problem. The immigrant does not represent a deficit to be made up. The vigor, good will, tradition and talent are there, and eager would be the response if we were to lead the way and point to the outlet for the immigrant's stifled yearning toward the ideal! This the Needle and Bobbin Club seems eminently fitted to do so far as the needle and loom work of the women are concerned; work which we have long ignored and discouraged here. The Club was formed among other things to stimulate, maintain and centralize the making of hand fabrics and to encourage a high standard of textile art. Why then let perish the fine national sewing and weaving arts that have been brought to our shores and that might so greatly enrich America? Why, for instance, continue to permit art tragedies such as that which almost engulfed Italian puppetry?

"Signor Marosi had been an impresario twenty years before, in Messina. He was, like his fathers before him, the keeper of a serious and very ancient art, the folk-theatre of Sicily. This was only a marionette show, but the figures were life-size and their were hundreds of

them. They played the heroic tales of chivalry, bloody melodramas of the Italian civil wars, and morality and mystery plays. Signor Marosi had brought this show, with its art tradition, to America. Marosi had a deep and rich voice, and a rich nature. The Marosi family danced, dialogued, and sang the whole show.

"The Marosi theatre was a neighborhood center for three blocks around. It was regularly patronized by several hundred Italians. They came in family groups, and in groups of friendly families. The physical air was bad enough, but the social air was delightful. Few of the patrons talked English, but they sang thrillingly in Sicilian dialect, and they were a unit upon the moral questions which were raised in the marionette dramas. Fourteen years ago there were six other marionette shows in New York, every one of them a true neighborhood center for hundreds of people. When they passed away—for all of them but one are gone—New York City was the loser not only of a child-like and really beautiful form of drama, the oldest form which survives in the western hemisphere, but of a vital social center. That whole group of a thousand and more Americans-in-the-making, whom the marionette theatre had held together, could have been transplanted to a school building, following the marionette show, which could easily have been transplanted, and they could not only have been gradually infused with every good American influence, but their own richness of social inheritance could have been preserved for New York, which needs it.

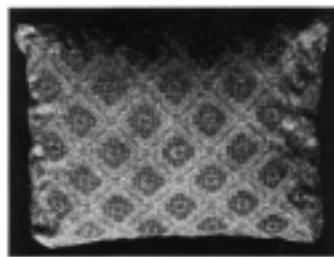
"The Marosi equipment is now in a garret, and Signor Marosi has gone into the plumbing business. The boys roll cigarettes for a living. They are good people—there is no better human material, no better social capacity in New York, than in the Marosis and their circle. There is no more pathetic loyalty to friends, to family and traditions and to the social ideals which they know.

* * * * "The immigrant of America is a victim and a menace, and it is totally unnecessary for him to be either. He is eager to be a good American. He has his gifts for us. He is here to stay."

So too could the foreign women be brought into friendly social sewing or lace-making circles where interest in this country would be spurred by our interest in the women's native products, and their delight in gaining a little extra money in the free hours when household cares could temporarily be put aside. At the Needlework Guild of the Ukrainian Settlement we are told that "bright-eyed, clear-skinned," happy-looking

babies sometimes accompany the women to the working bee, reflecting the calm of their mothers—a restful content, produced by creating something beautiful and inwardly satisfying.

In order to start and build up such a work of conservation and Americanization, the Directors of the Needle and Bobbin Club have formed a committee or branch, which they are calling the Guild of the Needle and Bobbin Crafts. To organize its work, form and keep files of information, arrange exhibitions, start new groups through the help of the settlements, show the immigrants how to adapt their knowledge to our current uses, enroll Guild members paying small annual dues, et cetera, a competent teacher and organizer, director or executive will be needed; and it is hoped that before many months the Guild may have received enough to engage such a manager and start upon active, helpful work. The Club's president in June sent out over three hundred letters telling members of what was contemplated, and asking their immediate cooperation. A quantity of other letters were dispatched through the kindness of Miss McDowell and the People's Institute, to craft groups throughout the country in an effort to obtain detailed information. Typical, sectional industries, such as those of the Mountain Whites, and of old New England communities will also be included that their work too may be conserved and encouraged. It is hoped in the early spring to hold a very representative exhibit of all these characteristic laces, embroideries, weaves and tapestries.



CUSHION COVER AND LITTLE BAG MADE BY ITALIAN WOMEN IN NEW YORK