

BELGIUM'S NEW LACE SCHOOLS

NOTE BY THE EDITOR. The following letter has been received from Mme. Mali-Kefer, one of our foreign members. We take great pleasure in publishing it, as it is of more than usual interest, showing that, in spite of Belgium's agonizing four years and more, one of her stellar industries is not to perish. Let us congratulate all those who have made possible the "renaissance" of the lace industry in Belgium.

THE dear little Belgian Queen, whose intelligence and generosity would naturally prompt her to take a great interest in lace workers, has created a society, "Les Amies de la Dentelle," who are to carry her intentions through.

The first thing it did was to form a normal school for teachers to enable them in turn to teach lace in a graphic way. Lace-making for many years had been taught by the most old-fashioned methods, each child being shown separately the different and successive steps it had to take, thus losing much time, and, moreover, obtaining only a routine knowledge and a very mechanical skill. It was like learning music by heart and by ear, and not by sight. And sometimes, if the lace worker married into another province where a different kind of lace was sold (for the various kinds still remain localized, as you know), she was unable to decipher the new kind she had before her eyes.

It was therefore decided to follow a French method used in Le Puy, France. A very large, light green cushion is put against the wall, cords of several colors, representing the threads, and big hat pins in place of the usual pins are used, so that fifty little girls may see the whole process from their benches. They each have their own little cushions with the same colored threads, and you should see their joy when they play what seems to them an easy game.

This school had to be established in a convent, because the greater part of the teachers are nuns, and they come and spend a few months there to

learn this very simple, modern way of teaching. They learn also that it is necessary for lace workers to unite in a syndicate or trade union.

In short, we fight to our best ability against the dreadful drawbacks of solitary work. The convents, always a little behind the times, have not fought vigorously against this evil, but they are willing to help now. There are also many lay teachers in the normal school.

Still another school was necessary,—one for the teaching of lace design. The reason why the old designs have always been adhered to is that technical specialists are not, as a rule, artists, and artists have not the patience to learn the technique of lace, a knowledge so necessary to produce a good design.

We have, fortunately, found an artist, an intelligent woman, who undertook this heavy task. And now, although the school began work just a few months before the dark days of the war, and had not been advertised, it has helped two or three dozens of young girls to earn something like a livelihood. A clear, rational method has been created which will be published soon, showing how decorative art principles may be applied to the requirements of each sort of technique. Different are the designs of uncut thread laces such as Valenciennes, old Flemish lace, Cluny, etc., and the designs of what a celebrated edict of Louis XIV named “*dentelle à pièces rapportées*,” which do not need the same calculations. Different are needle design requirements, and so on.

We hope to render lace-making more interesting for the worker, and make her more proud of it. We hope to get a better salary for her, and a finer and more intelligent work in return.

Our normal school is in Bruges, one of the largest lace centres, where the pupils come quite spontaneously; while our lace design school is in Brussels, centre or market of lace, commercially, where the big merchants live and where museums, books, lectures, fashions, shops, help young girls to have taste,—more so than in provincial towns. But these two schools are in contact, the one working for the other.

The “*Amies de la Dentelle*” instituted “*concours*” for lace design, and, according to their funds, help and survey other schools. During the war we became a group of the National Committee and gave work to 45,000 women, more or less. The Americans helped us most beautifully. Mrs. Brand Whitlock worked hard to send us customers. She was made Hon-

orary President of our Lace Committee. And now that regular commerce is recuperating, we resume our work of "Enseignement et conciliation entre les patrons et les ouvrières"—for we think they are both necessary and interesting.

BELGIUM

NINETEEN FOURTEEN

A THREAD of gossamer! A lovely line
Set by a master in a brave design;
A hand that toiled while spun the world through space;
Peace, patience, labor—then the Belgian lace!

A brush, a palette, and the colors ground,
True to the life that spread those colors 'round;
Touch upon touch, each of the next a part;
Peace, patience, labor—then the Belgian art.

A noble model in a builder's mind,
Month after month, year after year refined;
Stone upon stone, built up with pious care,
And then Malines Cathedral in the air!

Ah, gracious God! What demon is so fleet
To lay time's wonders, ruins at our feet?

BLANCHE WILDER BELLAMY.