

IRISH LACE.

THE history of lace-making in Ireland is more or less the history of Irish distress. Art needlework was never there the occupation of the rich and noble as it was in Italy and Spain. It owes its origin to the charitable, who taught it in times of famine to the peasantry as a means of winning bread. Between whiles, as the excellent pamphlet compiled by Messrs. Ben Lindsey and C. Harry Biddle plainly tells, the work has flagged, to revive when the next season of scarcity stimulated the country to new exertion. There is no indigenous lace in Ireland, and all the many kinds it makes are copies of foreign models. This, though it shows a want of artistic originality on the part of the workers, greatly adds to the variety and charm of the Mansion House Exhibition. Here are Rose point, Venetian point, and Spanish point, Guipure and Brussels appliqué, side by side with the laces that have obtained a national character of their own, as Limerick, Tambour, Run, Irish point, lace crochet, and what is called Ardee tatting.

The crochet laces and the Ardee tatting owe their existence to the famine of 1846-47, when, from the failure of the potato crop, nearly two million persons perished from want of food. Lace-making was then revived, and new centres created throughout the country; and the industry obtained a prominence which, though at least a hundred years old, it had never before attained. In 1820, during another time of bad harvests, two ladies named Reid, of Ahans, near Carrickmacross, heard of the success with which a neighbour had taught her servant-maid to make Brussels appliqué lace. They set themselves to learn the art, and then to teach it to the young girls in their neighbourhood; and thus unostentatiously was founded the Appliqué and Guipure industry of Carrickmacross, of which so many beautiful examples are to be seen in the loan and sale cases at the Mansion House. Some few years after a purely commercial venture was made in Limerick, by a Mr.

Walker, of Oxford, who brought over from England twenty-four lace-makers to instruct the women of Limerick. Apt pupils they proved themselves, and very soon many kinds of lace were produced in great quantities, till Limerick Guipure and Appliqué successfully rivalled those of Carrickmacross. Other and cheaper laces were made beside—notably the two kinds of worked net commonly known as Limerick lace. Of these the more ordinary and less attractive is the Tambour, which is made by a thread drawn through the net by a crochet-needle, and forming a sort of chain. It is now the chief manufacture of the waning industry of Limerick, for the Run lace—the prettiest of all cheap laces, in which the pattern is formed in the net with a fine thread—is rapidly passing away, as the Appliqué and Guipure have passed already. The temptation to work cheap, in the utterly false hope of a larger market, and the unwillingness of the young girls of a city to acquire so tedious and difficult an art as the making of good lace, are among the first causes. Moreover, Fashion has tired of light net laces and voted in favour of richer and heavier kinds. And, indeed, this preference does not seem astonishing when we look at the beautiful point laces of Innishmaccsaint, which compare with the old productions of Italy and Spain. Venetian, Spanish, and, above all, Rose point lace are so marvellously imitated there that it is difficult to realise that not one of the beautiful fine time-stained laces before us was made before the famine, or that these luxurious trimmings—also at Cappoquin, in Waterford—are the productions of the poorest people in the world.

The charity that prompted the rector's wife and sister at Innishmaccsaint inspired a nun in the convent of the Presentation order at Youghal to copy an old piece of point lace. She was a woman of no ordinary penetration and skill. She showed a wise discretion in the choice of her pupils, and a rare ingenuity in her use of the patterns sent her for

imitation. Every fresh pattern suggested some new combination of stitches or design till the lace made in her school grew known as "Irish point," and secured a certain market for as much as can be produced. Her success suggested the same course to others, and now Irish point is made at New Ross, Kenmare, Killarney, Clonakilty, Waterford; and Kinsale, though Youghal still bears the palm, the most beautiful laces in the whole exhibition being the Irish point sleeves lent by Miss Laurence, which were made there. At the time of the great famine crochet was the fashionable needlework, and this being the work in which Irish ladies were the most skilled, was naturally that they taught their *protégées*. The coarse, cheap kind is contemptible enough; and wherever—as is the case with the pearl tatting of Ardee—the peasantry have succumbed to the temptation of making it the industry has died; but the market town of Clones, in Monaghan, had in Mrs. Hand, the rector's wife, a lady of immense natural business talent, and under her management the industry grew and flourished. Greek lace is

imitated so well as to be of almost equal value with the original, and Venetian point is copied so skillfully as to be scarcely distinguishable from real. The Spanish point and Jesuit lace, as well as several kinds of Guipure, are more than rarely beautiful; they are brilliantly fashionable as well, though many connoisseurs still hold them inferior to the real point laces of Innishmacsaint and Cappoquin.

In the cases sent by trading firms there is much that is rare and beautiful, though it is a little disappointing to those who look hopefully towards a revival of Irish trade to find that in all the country only one firm—Messrs. Forest and Sons, of Dublin—have had the enterprise to send lace, the product of native industry, to the London Mansion House. Not a single tradesman in Cork, Belfast, Limerick, or Waterford has availed himself of this opportunity of making known and appreciated the beautiful results of Irish skill and handicraft; and it is to private collectors and English dealers that we are mainly indebted for this opportunity of studying the history and variety of Irish lace.

