

VENETIAN POINT.

(Made by Miss Keane's Workers, Cappoquin.)

## Lace-making in Ireland.

AS margarine to the butter-maker, an oleograph to an artist, or a cast-iron well-cover to a Quentin Matsys; so is machine-made lace to the lace-lover. This observation may seem unnecessary, but, as Philistines abound and flourish who insist that machinery has superseded the old and laborious methods of lace-making, it is well that the relative positions of the two productions should be explained.

Lace-making takes rank high amongst the lesser arts. Those who produce it may be classed with the skilled goldsmith, jewel-setter, or enameller. In all these arts the design passes from the artist's hands to the workman's, and by the degree of the latter's sympathy with the former the amount of excellence in the result will be decided. Mere mechanical skill will not suffice. Any one who has supervised lace-making must know how one worker turns out a piece of lace, slightly uneven, faulty here and there, but sympathetic; the stitches are set to suit the curves of the patterns—all seems to flow as if designer and worker had had one thought between them. Another worker brings her lace. Very good; stitches as perfect as possible, no loose threads; and yet, as the artist said of his pupil's painting, "No fault to be found, but it wants *that*."

These remarks apply more exactly in speaking of point lace, where the materials used are entirely under the worker's control, every stitch being placed separately with several movements of the carefully-held needle. In pillow lace the materials will, to a certain extent, work their own way, a slight thickness in the thread, or flaw of any kind, being less noticeable to the worker as she twists and plaits her bobbins, winding her threads amongst her mysteriously grouped pins.

The object of this article is to give an outline of the rise, growth, and present position of lace-making in Ireland.

The preceding remarks will enable the reader to understand how much supervision the establishment of

the lace industry requires amongst a peasant population perhaps more untrained than any other people to appreciate what is beautiful. This remark is not lightly made. One who has lived amongst them cannot fail to notice the utter absence and entire want of appreciation of household gods of any kind. Of this people it cannot be said that house-pride is their besetting sin. They spin and weave in regions far from shops cleverly and well; in places where the ladies of the district have exerted themselves progress in this way has been made. But only the ruder kinds of stuffs for bodily clothing are yet attempted, and carvings, fine linen, or plate (guarded as heirlooms in the peasants' houses of Normandy and Brittany) are unknown.

The history of the country has doubtless partly produced this state of things; but that is a delicate subject, and one about which too many empty words have been spoken. Forbid it that more noise should here be added to the unseemly clamour! Rather let us turn to the unostentatious work that is being done to change these uninteresting homes, by giving to the women a trade which (speaking from the standpoint of many years' experience) has a distinctly civilising and refining effect on the character.

This last remark refers to the difficult and intricate kinds of lace-making. It is a curious fact that this has not been the result produced by the easier kinds of work, such as the coarse deteriorated Limerick lace or crochet-work, which is easily learnt and can be thoughtlessly produced. The effect in these cases is distinctly the reverse.

Communities such as convents are most suitable for the carrying on of this industry. To improve the eye and strengthen the feeling for form and delicacy of texture in one worker, and to correct the mechanical carelessness of her more tasteful sister, is a never-ending task. In a community, from the hourly intercourse, the necessary knowledge for this difficult post of teacher



passes almost imperceptibly from one to another. Here may the remark be made that in this lies both a power and a weakness, for good or bad traditions seem almost harder to eradicate in communities than in individuals.

Unfortunately, in this country the traditions as regards design have been more inspired by sentiment than knowledge of art. A distorted harp, a few caricatured shamrocks, occasionally an Irish deerhound,

dexterous handiwork so wasted. The Committee did more than shudder; they prevailed upon the South Kensington authorities to send over Mr. Alan Cole to lecture, and show good specimens of ancient lace. Through this means, and the very great patience, kindness, and perseverance of Mr. Cole and Mr. Brenan, R.H.A., head of the Cork School of Art, a peaceful revolution has taken place.



LIMERICK LACE.

(Made by Mrs. Vere O'Brien's Workers.)

with a round tower placed beside him, as though it were his kennel—these oddly-assorted emblems furnished the stock-in-trade of many a designer.

Since the connection of the lace schools with the Schools of Art an era has opened for all remote centres, and good teaching is to be had for all who desire it.

In the Cork Exhibition of 1883 Lady Colthurst and Mrs. Ludlow Beamish had, amongst other women's industries, an exhibition of local lace. All who understood the matter looked and shuddered to see so much clever,

Special rules were made at the Schools of Art to enable nuns who could not leave their convents to acquire the knowledge they wished for; and all through the South of Ireland, Mr. Brenan travels at certain periods from convent to convent, holding classes for instruction in designs, as far as Dingle in Kerry, and lending specimens and photographs of lace provided from South Kensington. Mr. Cole's visits continue from time to time, and for the hearty way he has helped on this movement the Irish lace-makers cannot be too

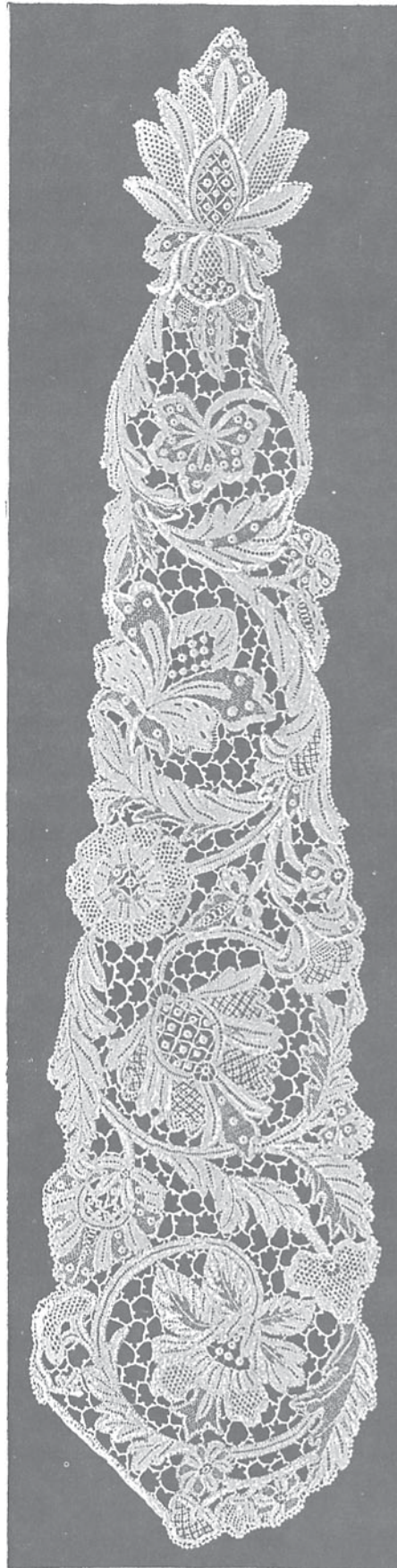


grateful. A system he has started for giving prizes for new designs has succeeded admirably, and many people, both here and in England, have become interested in this special branch of the movement, showing their interest by supplying funds for the prizes awarded.

Government has within the last two years appointed Mrs. Power Lalor as inspector of the work done in convents, and her energy has given new life to the commercial side of the undertaking, a kind of energy much wanted, which is every day more appreciated by those somewhat exhausted in the process of having their lace sent off so as to do credit to their classes.

Before giving a short account of the different schools, it may as well be stated that a certain philanthropic Lady Arabella Denny is said to have established many lace industries in this country. Beneficial at the time, they ceased with her death, before the beginning of this century. She appears to have worked in the Carrickmacross district, as it is stated in a short history of that school, after mentioning her name as beginner of the work, that lace-making was there revived in 1820.

Foremost of the convent lace schools is that of the Poor Clares, at Kenmare, Co. Kerry. The enterprise and self-improving spirit shown by the nuns cannot be too highly praised. Feeling they had much to learn that their laces might successfully compete with those of France, Belgium, and Italy, they have left no means untried to gain knowledge of design and of their subject in all its technicalities, and were amongst the first to avail themselves of the offer of Mr. Cole's valuable visits. Point lace was first made at their convent about twenty years ago, being begun by the late Rev. Mother Abbess O'Hagan. Hard-working girls through this means keep themselves above the reach of want. The industry in Kenmare is thoroughly established,



LAPPET OF POINT LACE.

(Made at the Convent of Poor Clares, Kenmare, Co. Kerry.)

and buyers are ready for the laces the moment they leave the workers' hands. Since the connection of the convent with South Kensington, in 1884, the Sisters have received many prizes for designs: a bronze medal, six Queen's Prizes, also the first prize in the recent design competition for lace to be presented to the Pope by the Irish bishops, for an altar-fall, a rochet, and an alb.

Point lace is also made at a Killarney convent, where the same self-improving spirit is being shown. They have connected themselves with the School of Art in Cork, and intend to turn their attention chiefly to copies of Reticella, commonly called Greek lace.

At Newtownbarry, Co. Wexford, Mrs. Hall Dare has a small but admirably-managed class of workers. This school was founded in 1868, and in the same year Miss Keane began to teach lace-making at Cappoquin, Co. Waterford. These schools have something in common, as both ladies have invariably copied old Italian laces, thereby avoiding many pitfalls. At Newtownbarry perfect reproductions of Reticella are made. Mrs. Hall Dare learnt this work in London, and so was able to teach her village girls. In Cappoquin one or two women had a slight knowledge of point lace stitches, probably derived from Youghal, only sixteen miles distant. Miss Keane and one of the women unravelled some old Venetian rose point, and so learnt the method of working. Only Venetian laces and the finest kinds of Reticella are made at this school.

In the convent in Youghal the lace called Irish point is made in large quantities, and the industry is there well established. Latterly the authorities have shown a desire for new designs, and have connected themselves with the Schools of Art and South Kensington. The work in this convent was started in 1849 by Mrs. Smyth, a member of the community, who acquired

her knowledge of lace-making in the same way as Miss Keane, by the careful destruction of some old specimens. About eighty girls are here employed, many earning a livelihood.

Mrs. Kavanagh, of Borris, had for many years a well-managed school, but it appears to have dwindled because the lace was of a kind that only satisfied a passing fashion. Point lace is also made at the convents of New Ross, Co. Wexford, and of Merrion, near Dublin.

At Innismacsaint, Co. Donegal, there is a factory where Italian laces are copied in large quantities.

This completes the list of schools where point lace is made.

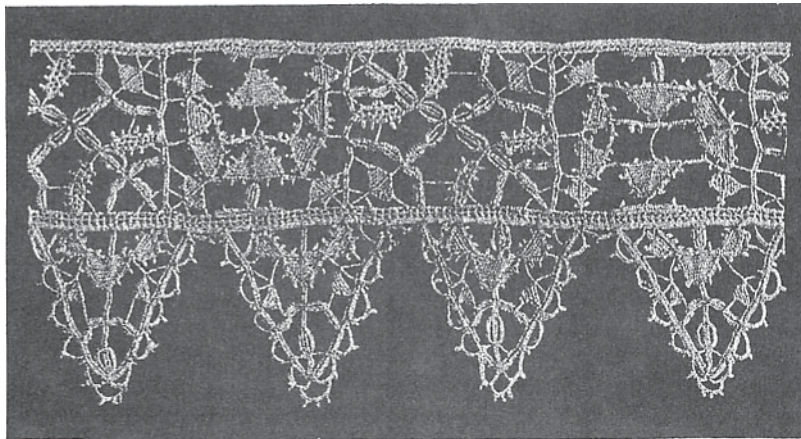
Many other kinds are produced throughout the country, principally at Limerick, where this once well-known work has been revived. Thirty years ago Messrs. Forrest, of Dublin, had a large factory there, and beautiful work was done under their supervision. This was of two kinds: tambour-work on net, and darning in patterns on net, the latter being the more delicate and difficult kind. When their factory ceased to exist Limerick lace quickly deteriorated, and, with the exception of that still made at the Good Shepherd Convent (which is altogether for Church purposes), the fine kinds were abandoned. Limerick lace lost its prestige, and was relegated to the use of dressing-tables and curtains. At present Messrs. Cannock, drapers in Limerick, have a factory chiefly for the tambour-work; and within the last few years Mrs. Vere O'Brien has collected some of Forrest's old workers, has put herself in connection with good London shops,

lace. This being shown to a lady of property, Miss Dora Reid, inspired her with the idea of establishing a school, where she had lace-making taught.

In 1846 Mr. Tristram Kennedy, a land-agent on Lord Bath's estate, seeing the benefit to the poor of Miss Reid's school, built seven others, one at Carrickmacross, the natural centre of the district on the Shirley Estate. These are known as the Bath and Shirley Schools. To them a grant was given by the Lords of the Privy Council of £100, and a further grant of £50 annually till the year 1883, or perhaps to the present date. Through these means lace-making is thoroughly established throughout the district. This work cannot be exactly classed with point lace, for, although the two kinds have many stitches in common, it (like Limerick lace) has a solid foundation to begin upon: in the latter case, net; in the former, linen or muslin. However, they have both been known as Limerick and Carrickmacross lace for so long that one must ignore the mixture of embroidery in both, and let the technical mistake pass, for fear of being accused of pedantry. This school also is working from patterns produced under the new South Kensington scheme, with most excellent results.

Pillow lace is not much made in Ireland. The Sisters of Mercy at the convent, Birr, King's County, have taught it to the children in their industrial school, and Brussels and Honiton sprigs are copied and applied with much success. Here, at one time, point d'Alençon was attempted, but abandoned as too tedious and trying to the sight.

Mrs. Dawson, Houndswood, Cong, is now making torchon, a most useful and comparatively cheap kind of



GREEK LACE.

(Made by Mrs. Hall Dare's Workers, Newtownbarry.)

provided good designs and materials, and renovated the drooping trade. She is beginning to add young hands to her veteran band of workers, and hopes thoroughly to re-establish the industry, with its old character for good taste.

At Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan, much lace is made. It appears to be the oldest of the schools, for in 1820, at Dunamoyne, Mrs. Gray Porter, wife of the rector of that place, taught her maid to make Brussels

pillow lace. At the annual Exhibition of Industries at Lismore Castle for the cottagers on the Duke of Devonshire's estate, specimens of Maltese lace (black and white) are still shown, the workers being the remnant of a number once employed at the convent, Tallow, Co. Waterford. The work there appears to have languished for want of a renewal of patterns and ideas, but enough remains to rebuild the industry, if an enterprising manager could be found.



Valenciennes lace was once well made at the Dowager Lady de Vesci's school, Abbeyleix, Queen's County; but that, too, has been abandoned (as so many enterprises of the kind inevitably are), either through the death of the originator or some other cause.

In fact, unless some scheme for a central agency in Dublin (now talked of) can soon be carried out, much of the valuable work being done by private philanthropists must be irretrievably lost. The first stages of drudgery are over in most of the schools, and a consecutive commercial policy is required, in order that the next generation may take up the work already begun, and go straight on in their struggles after perfection.

A few years ago an Irish copy of a point d'Alençon flounce was shown beside its beautiful model to one of the principal Paris lace merchants. "Ah!" said he, "one is a smile; the other a grimace."

We do not mean to be satisfied till we, too, can smile in a perfectly captivating manner.

If this sketch of the rise and present position of lace-making in Ireland should contribute to awaken general interest in the subject, another step will have been gained. Those who wish to know more will have an opportunity of judging for themselves whether we are making progress, in the women's section of the Glasgow Exhibition of 1888.

H. E. KEANE.