

OF LACE

LACE is a term freely used at the present time to describe various sorts of open ornament in thread work, the successful effect of which depends very much upon the contrasting of more or less closely-textured forms with grounds or intervening spaces filled in with meshes of equal size or with cross-ties, bars, etc. Whence it has come to pass that fabrics having an appearance of this description, such as embroideries upon nets, cut linen works, drawn thread works, and machine-woven counterfeits of lace-like fabrics, are

frequently called laces. But they differ Of Lace.
in make from those productions of certain
specialised handicrafts to which from the
sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries lace
owes its fame.

These specialised handicrafts are di-
visible into two branches. The one
branch involves the employment of a
needle to loop a continuous thread into
varieties of shapes and devices; the
other is in the nature of making corre-
sponding or similar ornament by twisting
and plaiting together a number of separate
threads, the loose ends of which have to
be fastened in a row on a cushion or
pillow, the supply of the threads being
wound around the heads of lengthened
bobbins, so shaped for convenience in
handling. The first-named branch is
needlepoint lace-making; the second,
bobbin or pillow lace-making. Needle-
point lace-making may be regarded as a

Of Lace. species of embroidery, whilst bobbin or pillow lace-making is closely allied to the twisting and knotting together of threads for fringes. Embroidery, however, postulates a foundation of material to be enriched with needlework, whereas needlepoint and pillow lace are wrought independently of any corresponding foundation of material.

The production of slender needles and small metal pins is an important incident in the history of lace-making by hand. Broadly speaking, the manufacture for a widespread consumption of such metal pins and needles does not date earlier than the fourteenth century. Without small implements of this character delicate lace-making is not possible. It is therefore fair to assume that although historic nations like the Egyptian, Assyrian, Hebrew, Greek, and Roman, made use of fringes and knotted cords upon

their hangings, cloaks, and tunics, lace Of Lace.
was unknown to them. Their bone,
wooden, or metal pins and needles were
suited to certain classes of embroidery
and to the making of nets, looped cords,
etc., but not to such lace-making as
we know it from the early days of the
sixteenth century.

About the end of the fifteenth century,
with the development in Europe of fine
linen for underclothing, collars and cuffs
just visible beyond the outer garments
came into vogue, and a taste was speedily
manifested for trimming linen under-
shirts, collars and cuffs, with insertions
and borders of kindred material. This
taste seems to have been first displayed
in a marked manner by Venetian and
Flemish women ; for the earliest known
books of engraved patterns for linen
ornamental borders and insertions are
those which were published during the

Of Lace. commencement of the sixteenth century at Venice and Antwerp. But such patterns were designed in the first place for various sorts of embroidery upon a material, such as darning upon canvas (*punto fa su la rete a maglia quadra*), drawn thread work of reticulated patterns (*punto tirato* or *punto a reticella*), and cut work (*punto tagliato*). Patterns for quite other sorts of work, such as point in the air (*punto in aere*) and thread work twisted and plaited by means of little leaden weights or bobbins (*merletti a piombini*), were about thirty years later in publication. These two last-named classes of work are respectively identifiable (*punto in aere*) with needlepoint and (*merletti a piombini*) with bobbin lace-making; and they seem to date from about 1540.

The sixteenth-century and earliest known needlepoint laces (*punto in aere*)

are of narrow lengths or bands, the patterns of which are composed principally of repeated open squares filled in with circular, star, and other geometric shapes, set upon diagonal and cross lines which radiate from the centre of each square to its corners and sides. When the bands were to serve as borders they would have a dentated edging added to them; this edging might be made of either needlepoint or bobbin lace. As time went on the dimensions of both lace bands and lace vandykes increased so that, whilst these served as trimmings to linen, lace of considerable width and various shapes came to be made, and ruffs, collars, and cuffs were wholly made of it. Such lace was thin and wiry in appearance. The leading lines of the patterns formed squares and geometrical figures, amongst which were disposed small wheel and seed forms, little triangles, and such like.

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Of Lace. A few years later the details of these geometrically planned patterns became more varied, tiny human figures, fruits, vases and flowers, being used as ornamental details. But a more distinct change in character of pattern was effected when flowing scrolls with leaf and blossom devices, held together by means of little ties or bars, were adopted. Different portions of the scrolls and blossoms with their connecting links or bars would often be enriched with little loops or *picots*, with stitched reliefs, and varieties of close and open work. Then came a taste for arranging the bars or ties into trellis grounds, or grounds of hexagons, over which small ornamental devices would be scattered in balanced groups. At the same time, the bobbin or pillow lace-workers produced grounds of small equal-size meshes in plaited threads. This inventiveness on the part

of the bobbin or pillow workers reacted upon the needlepoint workers, who in their turn produced still more delicate grounds with meshes of single and double twisted threads. Of Lace.

Lace, passing from stage to stage, thus became a filmy tissue or fabric, and its original use as a somewhat stiff, wiry-looking trimming to linen consequently changed. Larger articles than borders, collars, and cuffs were made of the new filmy material, and lace flounces, veils, loose sleeves, curtains, and bed-covers were produced. This transition may be traced through the first hundred and twenty years of lace-making. It culminated during the succeeding ninety years in a development of fanciful pattern-making, in which realistic representation of flowers, trees, cupids, warriors, sportsmen, animals of the chase, emblems of all sorts, rococo and architectural ornament,

Of Lace. is typical. Whilst the eighteenth century may perhaps be regarded as a period of questionable propriety in the employment of ornament hardly appropriate to the twisting, plaiting, and looping together of threads, it is nevertheless notable for *tours de force* in lace-making achieved without regard to cost or trouble. From this stage, the climax of which may be placed about 1760, the designing of lace patterns declined ; and from the end of the eighteenth to the first twenty years or so of the nineteenth centuries, laces, although still made with the needle and bobbins, became little more than finely-meshed nets powdered over with dots or leaves, or single blossoms, or tiny sprays.

Within the limits of a brief note like the present, it is not possible to discuss local peculiarities in methods of work and styles of design which established

the characters of the various Venetian Of Lace.
and other Italian points, of the French
points of Alençon and Argentan, of the
cloudy Valenciennes, Mechlin, and Brus-
sels laces. . Neither can one touch upon
the nurturing of the industry by nuns in
convents, by workers subsidised by State
grants, and so forth. It would require
more space than is available to fairly
discuss what styles of ornament are least
or most suited to lace-making ; or
whether lace is less rightly employed as
a tissue for the making of entire articles
of costume or of household use, than as
an ornamental accessory or trimming to
costume.

Whilst very much lace is a fantastic
adjunct to costume, serving a purpose
sometimes like that of *appoggiature* and
fioriture in music, other lace, such as
the carved-ivory-looking scrolls of Vene-
tian raised points, which are principally

Of Lace. associated with the *jabots* and ruffles of kings, ministers, and marshals, and with the ornamentation of priests' vestments, is certainly more dignified in character. The loops, twists, and plaits of threads are more noticeable in laces of comparatively small dimensions than they are in laces of great size. Size rather tempts the lace-worker to strive for ready effect, and to sacrifice the minuteness and finish of hand work, which give quality of preciousness to lace. The *via media* to this quality lies between two extremes; namely, applying dainty threads to the interpretation of badly shaped and ill-grouped forms on the one hand, and on the other hand adopting a style of ornament which depends upon largeness of detail and massiveness in grouping, and is therefore unsuited to lace. Without finish of handicraft, producing beautiful ornament suited to the

material in which it is expressed, lace Of Lace.
worthy the name cannot be made.

The industry is still pursued in France, Belgium, Venice, Austria, Bohemia, and Ireland. Honiton has acquired a notoriety for its pillow laces, many of which some hundred years ago were as varied and well executed as Brussels pillow laces. Other English towns in the Midland counties followed the lead chiefly of Mechlin, Valenciennes, Lille, and Arras, but were rarely as successful as their leaders. Saxony, Russia, and the Auvergne produce quantities of pillow laces, having little pretence to design, though capable of pretty effects when artistically worn. There is no question that the want of a sustained intelligence in appreciating ingenious hand-made laces has told severely upon the industry; and as with other artistic handicrafts, so with

Of Lace. lace-making, machinery has very considerably supplanted the hand. There is at present a limited revival in the demand for hand-made laces, and efforts are made at certain centres to give new life to the industry by infusing into it artistic feeling derived from a study of work done during the periods when the art flourished.

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