

Lace in America

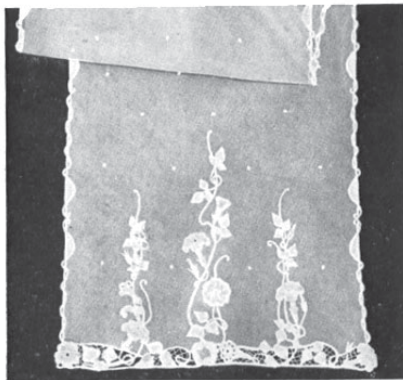
That America does produce fine laces is not generally known and the examples shown here prove that our lace makers are far along the road to success

By MARIAN POWYS

IF lace is really to take the place in American life that it does in Europe, there must be a much more discriminating knowledge of the subject. The real beauty of lace depends almost entirely on design. This is a phase of this art that has been frequently overlooked. Lacemakers themselves forget it in the fineness of the work. Owners are very apt to forget it, too, thinking rather of the value of the lace than of its intrinsic beauty.

A piece of lace should be beautiful in every line at a distance; and the work should be fine enough to give a sense of beauty yet undiscovered. There should be in it exquisite secrets known only to the maker and to those who understand.

No one who has seen the lace industry in Venice can forget how the peculiar quality of the designs belonging to that school harmonize with the free-flowing charm and grace of the great Venetian artists. These masters themselves made designs for lace. They did not think



A scarf resembling that which was worn by our grandmothers, differing in that the morning glory is realistic rather than conventional in type, and that it is being made today in a quaint back yard on Twelfth Street, New York City.



An exquisite XVIIth Century Lille bridal veil of rare bobbin lace, made in strips five inches wide and by excellent workmanship imperceptibly joined into this square design. Single background with sketches "a jours" are "joint de mariage."

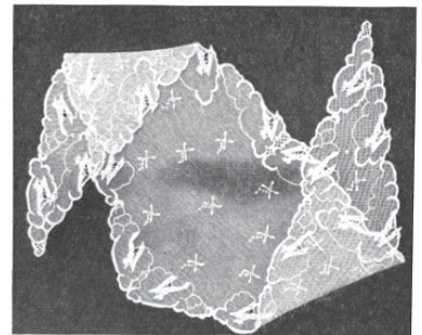
that it showed a small or effeminate nature to do work so fine. Michael Angelo is reported to have made designs for *Riticello* and *Punto in Aria*. They did not demand that lace should be executed in color to be beautiful, as do so many of our color-mad artists today. To them, beauty of form was of primary importance.

When the artist again cooperates with the lace-makers we may be assured of lace as beautiful as that of those past centuries.

It would seem that the lace made in our own days should express something of the spirit of our own times, restless, changing and chaotic as this may be. As it is, the work of the present day is almost invariably a copy of some former time. Italian laces are most often taken from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with some attempt at reproducing the eighteenth century French

work. Lace made in France generally harks back to the reigns of Louis Quinze and Louis Seize. Belgian laces have an unfortunate tendency to continue the designs of Mid-Victorian days, except in the Malines and Valenciennes, which go back to the eighteenth century. In England the west country workers cling to the days of Queen Victoria, who always so faithfully supported them, while the lacemakers of the Midlands use almost entirely eighteenth century patterns. The Irish lacemakers either copy Italian designs, or, if left to themselves, make Victorial designs largely composed of shamrocks.

From the end of the nineteenth century there has been in Europe a good deal of interest aroused in improving the quality of the lace made. The enthusiasts who have inaugurated this movement have been divided into two groups. The first



War lace, with design representing "a battle in air," bombs exploding as centre design; the aeroplanes floating in the clouds are to represent the Allies, while the Germans are descending rapidly to the ground. A purely original and modern thought masterfully interpreted in this delicate piece of lace.

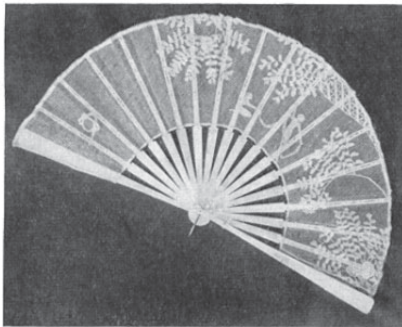
group is engaged in reproducing the laces of the finest periods, while the second group is struggling to originate new work which aims to express the spirit of our own age.

Leaders of the first group are on very safe ground, and have indeed already done splendid work. It seems unfortunate that the immense amount of time and skill to create even a small piece of work should be thrown away on a small and inadequate design. Drawings in the old pattern books of the sixteenth century with such charming names as, for instance, "*Il specchio di pensiero delle belle e virtuose donne*" by Mathio Pagan, and the "*corona delle nobili e virtuose donne*" by Vecellio are often easier to work out than the inferior designs so much in use. The Scuola d'Industrie Italiane in New York is reproducing cut work of this period and accomplishing excellent and interesting work.

The leaders of the second group, who are trying to create new and beautiful laces more expressive of the spirit of our own days, are facing a much more difficult

task, as the path they have chosen is beset with unforeseen dangers. They are conscious of the fear that their laces may turn out to be, in the judgment of future ages, inferior even to the work of the very worst periods. But at any rate, experts of the future will be able to place the date of these laces and to trace some connection with the thought of these tumultuous times. Even should our lacemakers succeed in making a design that would seem to be good, they are faced with the difficulty of persuading the lacemakers to work out such a moderate design. It is much easier to repeat old patterns than to work out new ones. I have been trying to create work of this type in Devon pillow lace. This lace is the same as English Honiton and is admirably adapted to experiment in design. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was called "Point d'Angleterre" and before that "Bone Lace," the lacemakers of those early days probably having used fishbones for pins. In technique it is closely allied to the Duchesse and Brussels *appliqué*, which are also descended by Point d'Angleterre, the finest of laces. They are all made in pieces small enough to be worked on a round pillow and when finished these pieces are put together on the pillow with bobbins, the joining being made with *picot brides* or *à jours*. Sometimes the sprays are applied to net with a charming effect if the net is fine enough. The better pieces have what is called "raised work," which helps to accentuate the lines of the design and gives an effect of relief.

The name "Point d'Angleterre" is hard to explain as it is not a point



This delicate bit of lace mounted on mother of pearl represents "maidens playing in the woods" with sprays of maiden hair ferns charmingly distributed on the background.

lace at all, nor is the greater part of it made in England. The explanation usually given is that the English lace dealers of the time of the Stuarts gave it this name when they had succeeded in smuggling it in from Flanders duty free. They appear to have been daring and unscrupulous fellows who carried through almost anything they attempted. The name they invented to cover their evil deeds is the only one ever used to describe this lace in all the museums of the world today.

It is said they succeeded in getting through £6,000 worth of French lace concealed in the coffin of the Bishop of Atterbury when his body was brought from France for interment. The body of some poor parson brought over from the Lowlands was actually stuffed with lace! Finally the customs authorities, in an excess of zeal, refused to pass even the body of the Duke of Devon-

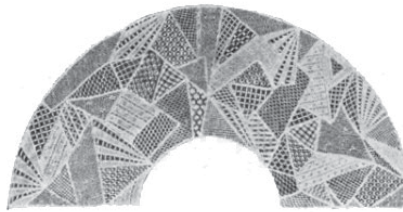
shire, without first poking it carefully with a stick.

In the early days of America there was quite a settlement of lacemakers at Ipswich near Boston. They made the Buckingham point lace, which in this country is generally called English thread. Their bobbins are said to have been made of bamboo. It is possible that a good deal of lace in this country that is generally called English thread was in reality made here in those early days.

Except for people who live, as it were, on the outside of fashion, lace has not for many years been the vogue in America. There has been a return to the medieval in dress—pure colors, handwoven textiles and embroideries. This fashion has prevailed in Europe as well as in America. But at last the pendulum has swung and real lace has come once again into vogue. Having swung so far in one direction it is apt to swing again just as far in the other direction. Now the danger of too violent a reaction sets in, for in lace—as in letters, music and painting—discrimination is the essential thing. It is necessary to study and have some understanding of the subject before the American woman can tell when and how to wear lace.

A writer of a generation ago very truly said: "The real good of a piece of lace then you will find in that it should show, first, that the designer of it had a pretty fancy; next, that the maker of it had fine fingers; lastly, that the wearer of it has worthiness or dignity enough to obtain what is difficult to obtain and commonsense enough not to wear it on all occasions."

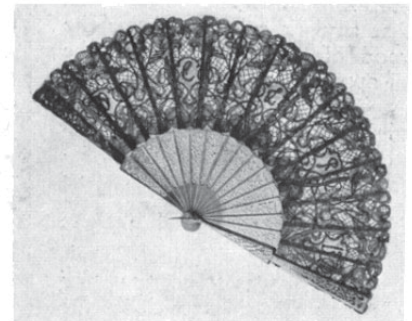
A little lace is often more effective than a great deal. Often inches of real lace, exquisitely made, completely change the character of a



Fan piece, designed to represent "the frosted pane" by joining of these different lace patterns in the futuristic motif. When suitably mounted it forms an unique and interesting personal ornament.



A white lace mantilla, needle run, of great beauty and of unusual design, worn over a black chantilly dress. The fan is of Honiton Appliqué—the same fan as illustrated to the left of this picture.



Black lace fan, with a border design of the initials of the woman for whom it was designed, set at regular intervals. This fan won a gold medal at the Panama Pacific Exposition.

gown. At the same time when a certain effect of exuberance and profusion is required this can be obtained more easily by the use of lace than in any other way.

One lace may make a woman look young and another make her look old. One makes her look frivolous and another may give her a certain maturity. One may give her a fine aristocratic air and another may throw about her the charm of the dairymaid.

Then again even if she gets the right kind of lace it is the design of the particular piece chosen that either brings out her beauty or smothers it. It is for this reason that the aristocracy of the past used to have its laces especially designed.