

THE HISTORY AND MYSTERY OF LACE.*

One of the most sumptuous books of the year is a new edition of Mrs. Bury Palliser's "History of Lace," enlarged and partly re-written by M. Jourdain and Alice Dryden. By bringing the history up to date and correcting whatever errors modern research has discovered, the present editors have retained the encyclopædic character of the information; while by added illustrations, many of them full-page plates, they have lent the volume something of the value of a cabinet of old lace. Indeed, the lover of lace will derive from these marvellously delicate photographs a joy scarcely inferior to that called forth by real Brussels and Mechlin.

The vast mass of fact in the book is made available by a chapter-division according to countries, and a fairly orderly history in each chapter of the particular kind or kinds of lace which the country has produced from early times to the present day. The division according to reigns of the parts which deal with France and England, cuts across this main plan rather confusingly, but perhaps could not have been avoided. The most interesting chapters are those at the beginning, which trace the de-

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velopment of lace — as far as that development can be traced — from embroidery and cut-work; and those on Italy, Flanders, Alençon, and Argentan. The work is largely antiquarian, and the fulness of reference to wardrobe rolls, inventories, bills, orders, and letters, not to mention plays and poems, shows the spirit of research in its most strenuous mood. To the ordinary novice in lace, the technical part of the work is the least satisfactory; but if one comes to the end without being able always to tell hobbin-lace from point-lace, he should doubtless blame his own obtuseness, and not attribute lack of clearness to the authors. To the initiate, Mrs. Palliser's minute technical knowledge will be as inspiring as it has been in previous editions of her book.

For most readers, the greatest virtue of the book will be found in its incidents rather than its main purpose. The most un-lacified critic will wonder after reading it, why he never before looked at the world from the lace point of view. Certainly toward individuals this point of view is most gracious. For example, Catherine de Medicis appears to unusual advantage teaching fine needlework to her daughters and to Mary of Scotland. Admiral Nelson takes on an unaccustomed charm of domesticity when we see him buying a lace shawl for his wife. And Browning's name has an added endearment when we know that he founded a school of lace-making for the peasant girls of Asolo. Some day a novelist will discover the possibilities of a lace background, and give us the romance of Barbara Uttman's introduction of lace-making into Germany, or of Gustaf Erikson's narrow escape from being betrayed by his lace collar.

Underneath these suggestions of romance are those of more serious import. An important chapter in the history of art might be written on the development of lace patterns from the geometric designs of Greek lace through the architectural period of Italian and French lace, and the incidental reign of the "frying-pan and turkey-tail patterns" in English Honiton, to the prevalence of designs from nature. Many chapters of political history are involved in the story of this most delicate of handicrafts, — the laying and removing of protective tariffs, the failing power of kings in lace night-caps to keep their subjects from wearing lace collars, and even the Revolution which followed the time when the daughter of Louis XV. spent £25,000 for the lace-trimmed linen of her trousseau. The church has had a large share in the story, having fostered and

in many cases inaugurated the craft, treasured its products when they were out of fashion, and also, alas! having often set the fashion of extravagant display. Even the Puritans have set their characteristic stamp on the industry, for it was a fair Puritan of whom Jasper Mayne wrote, in the days of King James, —

"She works religious petticoats; for flowers
She'll make church histories."

The deepest industrial problems underlie the decay of lace-making, which took place in all countries at times varying from the middle of the eighteenth to the middle of the nineteenth century. The revival in many places has also been due to industrial causes. We read that "Irish point owes its genesis to the failure of the potato crop in 1846," — an association of cause and effect which the ordinary philosopher would not have suspected. In many such times of distress, some philanthropist has searched out one or two old women who made lace in their youth, and persuaded them to teach younger fingers the half-forgotten stitches. There again is a field for romance. At present the problem in lace-making, as in all other handicrafts, is how to prevent the cheaper machine product from displacing the fabric of skill and delight.

Mrs. Palliser's book, which is primarily technical, touches these questions only incidentally. But that it does touch them, and always with the accurate prick of fact, gives it wider significance than it could otherwise have, and renders it pleasureable as well as illuminating to the general reader.

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