

Lisieux and its Linen Factories.

LISIEUX (France) is noted for its cotton and linen mills. The Tonques, a rapid little river, runs through the town, and drives the great undershot wheels of the factories. The undershot wheel seems to be the favorite here. The turbine is rarely seen, unless where some adventurous Englishman has come in to establish a manufactory. Having wandered around the place and seen all the old monuments, and learned that Lisieux was the Lexovium of Cesar, I attempted to investigate the mills, but was flatly refused entrance in every case. At last having got into conversation with a workman of one of the linen factories, I induced him to let me into the establishment.

A linen factory is not the most agreeable place to visit in the world. There is, to begin with, the carding room, with its dozen of hungry machines that seize on the flax with iron jaws, break it and tear it, and send it whirling through a whole digestive apparatus of wheels and toothless cylinders, until it runs out in long ribbons of felt-like substance into tall sheet-iron pots.

The clouds of dust that issue from the machines fill the eyes and ears and nose of the spectator, and he is very glad to pass on into the room of the spinners. Here one finds himself all at once in a temperature boiling hot, and an atmosphere filled with clouds of almost scalding steam. The spinning is on what is called the wet system; that is, the thread in going to the spindles passes through vats of scalding hot water. These vats are ranged along just behind and above each range of spindles, and are heated by steam-pipes. So intense is the heat in this room that it is impossible for the operatives to retain their clothing. The men were either quite naked, or wore simply a very short pair of drawers; and the women wore simply a cotton skirt coming down to the knees and up only to the waist. The aspect of the room, filled with clouds of steam and dripping with water everywhere, and these poor naked, pale, parboiled looking creatures, that came and went silent as spectres, was strange enough.

The thread having once passed through the water has a very disagreeable sour smell, that grows stronger and stronger as it goes on through the various processes of reeling, drying, hanking, and baling, until in the storerooms, where it is corded up in waiting for the market, the odor is positively overpowering.

The advantages of the wet system consist in the dissolving of certain glutinous substances of the flax in the hot water, which, on its cooling and drying, bind together the little filaments of the thread, and give increased strength.—*Correspondence Chicago Republican.*
