LACE, AND ITS MANUFACTURE.

The history of lace is a remarkable one. Thirty years ago was the period at which the middle and humble classes began to use productions which, though not actually lace, bore a strong resemblance to it; we mean bobbin-net. Before that period, lace, in all its forms, was the production of human labour, unaided by any machinery, except a few pins, a few little sticks, and a cushion; and the cost of production was so high, that none but the wealthy could afford to purchase the lace thus made. Since that time machines have been invented, amplified, and improved to such an extent, that a light and elegant material, answering the purposes of hand-made lace, has been brought within the reach of almost all classes of the community. It is computed that nearly thirty millions of square yards of bobbin-net are made annually in England, chiefly in the neighbourhood of Nottingham. We have given several statistical details of the bobbin-net trade in 'Penny Magazine,' vol. iii., p. 276: the present article will relate to other parts of the subject.

Beckmann has endeavoured to discover how far back the making of lace may be traced, but he could not find any details in the ancient authors to warrant the assumption that what is now called lace was known among them. There have, however, since his time, been plates of Grecian costume published, in which the female dresses are seen to be bordered with lace. The embroidered lace, or that which is worked with a needle, was more ancient than pillow-lace or bobbin-net; and lace of the former kind is sometimes found among old church furniture, from which it is probable that it was the production of nuns or of pious ladies of fortune, who had time to devote to such an exceedingly slow and tedious employment. This production probably originated in Italy, and from thence was introduced into Germany and France. Beckmann attributes the invention of pillow-lace to Barbara Uthmann, a native of Saxony, about the year 1560. The annalists of Saxony have made special mention of this circumstance, because it was of considerable importance at the time. The mines of Saxony had become less productive than formerly, and the miners' wives, who were principally employed in making veils by the old slow method of needle-work, could scarcely earn sufficient to support them. The new method of making lace was found to be so much more rapid, that it was soon learned by all the wives and daughters of the miners, and the lace which they manufactured, on account of the comparatively low price at which it could be produced, soon became fashionable, in opposition to the Italian lace worked with the needle, and even supplanted it in commerce.

Under the ministry of the celebrated Colbert, the lace manufacture, as then practised in Brussels, was introduced into France. Count de Marsan brought from Brussels to Paris his former nurse, whose name was Dumont, and her four daughters, in 1666. These were all lace-makers, and they received an exclusive right to establish and carry on the lace manufacture in Paris. In a little time Dumont and her daughters collected more than two hundred females, many of whom were of good families, who produced such excellent work, that it soon acquired a reputation both in France and elsewhere. It is certain that before this period the making of lace was very common in Flanders and Belgium. De Reiffen-berg states that there is a series of six engravings now existing, by Martin de Vos, Dubruyn, and Londerseel, executed about the year 1580. These represent human occupations at different periods of life. In one of them is a young woman seated, with the apparatus in her lap for making pillow-lace.

Mechlin, Brussels, Valenciennes, and a few other continental towns, continued to be the principal marts for lace. During the seventeenth century there was quite a rage for this production, men as well as women wearing it in profusion; and even down to the end of the last century it was calculated that nearly ten thousand females were employed at lace-making in Brussels alone. Since that time the production of machine-made bobbin-net in England, and to a smaller extent on the Continent, has greatly reduced the amount of pillow-made lace. Valenciennes, which used formerly to be one of the chief places of its production, had not, in 1825, more than three hundred persons employed at it.

The period of the introduction of lace-making into England cannot be well ascertained, but it appears to have been somewhat about the reign of Queen Eliza. There is as yet no account of the Lollards in Flanders. Honiton in Devonshire was one of the first places at which it was carried on in England. At this town the manufacture was very flourishing in the time of Charles I. During the early part of the reign of George III., Honiton lace was much patronised by the royal family, and the manufacturers at that place employed upwards of 2400 persons in the town and its neighbourhood. By the year 1822 this number, probably on account of the increase in the bobbin-net
manufacture, had fallen to 300. What is the number of
persons employed at the present time we do not know;
but the recent Royal marriage has shown that Honiton
lace is yet an object of demand. Generally speaking,
we believe the thread employed in making Honiton lace
is imported from Antwerp, the British thread being con-
sidered inferior for that purpose.

The counties in England where the manufacture of
thread-lace is carried on are principally Devonshire,
Buckinghamshire, and Bedfordshire. Bone-lace (as
the thread-lace was then called) was made at Olney in
Buckinghamshire in the time of Fuller, and after that
gradually extended throughout the greater part of the
county. At the beginning of the present century, before
the improvements in bobbin-net machinery were made,
the principal scene of lace-making in Buckinghamshire
was at Halsnpe, but it extended fifteen or twenty miles
round in every direction. In 1801, out of 1275 inha-
bilants of Halsnpe, no fewer than 800 were engaged in
this manufacture. Children were put to 'lace-schools'
at or soon after five years of age. At eleven or twelve
years of age they were able to earn enough for their
own subsistence. Both girls and boys were taught to make
lace, and even men were employed on it; it was often
a good resource to men out of their usual employments, for
they could earn as much at it as the generality of day-
labourers. At the period of which we speak the lace
made at Halsnpe varied in value from sixpence to two
guineas per yard.

The lace made in Bedfordshire was, for some reason or
other, not of so fine a quality as that produced in some
parts of Buckinghamshire; and the straw-plaiting,
which has been carried on to a greater extent in Bed-
fordshire than in other counties, was generally more
profitable.

British pillow-lace appears to have been at its height
from 1800 to 1812. There were some very striking im-
provements made in the patterns about the former period,
which led to a greatly increased demand, and British lace
veils sold for from twenty to one hundred guineas each.
About 1812, however, the competition of the bobbin-net
manufacture began to be felt in earnest, and from that
period pillow-lace making dwindled down to a very
low ebb. Fashion may perhaps give it a temporary re-
vival, but it is doubtful whether ever again it will be in
a flourishing state.

Without professing to give a minute account of the
mode of producing Brussels lace, or the kind similar to
it, we may convey a few general notions respecting it.
It is a light tissue or fabric made from single threads,
the openings or meshes between them being formed by twisting
the threads round pins. The work-bench, if we may
use the term, is generally an oval plate, stuffed and
covered so as to form a cushion or pillow; and this is
placed either on a table or on the lap. On this pillow
a stiff piece of parchment is placed, and holes are pricked
through the parchment in any desired form. Through
these holes pins are stuck into the pillow. The threads with
which the lace is formed are wound upon small bobbins;
and from these bobbins the threads are woven around the
pins, and twisted round each other in various ways, so as
to form a pattern. The formation of the meshes may be
described thus: Suppose a number of ropes to be laid
parallel, each consisting of two or three threads twisted
round each other, but at every two or three spiral turns
the threads composing one rope are twisted around those
of its neighbour, and then return to be twisted with its
own; this, being done with the whole of the threads,
forms the meshwork or ground of the whole piece. The
shape of the meshes depends upon the number of
threads which are made before the thread of one rope
are twisted round those of the adjoining one. In the
making of lace these various twistings are effected either
by twisting the threads round the pins, or twisting the
bobbins round each other. What we have been here de-
scribing is the mode by which the meshes or plain
groundwork are produced. The lace is, however, orna-
mented by a thread, much thicker than that forming the
net, which is woven or knitted in among the meshes in
the form of flowers and other tasteful designs. The value
of the lace principally depends on the elegance and com-
pleteness of these worked devices.

These are the outlines of all the methods; but the
minutiae were and are different in different places. It is
believed that the first ever made in England was that
which is marked Buchs lace, for which the network or
ground is made by the pillow and bobbins, and the pat-
ttern and sprigs worked with the needle. The distin-
guishing features of the principal foreign laces are said
by Mr. Slater (M'Culloch's 'Dict.') to be as follows:—

Brussels ground: an hexagonal or six-sided mesh formed
by plating and twisting four threads of flax to a perpen-
dicular line of mesh. Brussels wire-ground: this is
made of silk; the meshes are partly straight and partly
arched, and the pattern is worked separately by the
needle. Mechin: an hexagonal mesh formed of three
flax threads twisted and platted to a perpendicular line;
the pattern is worked in the net. Valentionnes: the
mesh is an irregular hexagon formed of two threads,
partly twisted and platted at the top of the mesh; the
pattern is, as in the Mechin lace, worked in the net.

Lisle: this is a diamond-shaped mesh, formed of two
threads platted to a perpendicular line. Alençon: an
hexagonal mesh of two threads, twisted like the generality
of Buckingham lace, and considered inferior to most of
the preceding. Alençon point: formed of two threads to
a perpendicular line, with octagonal and square meshes
alternately.

Our former article on bobbin-net contains as much
information as it may be necessary to give respecting the
state and present state of that branch of industry. We
may, however, say a few words as to the mode of manu-
facture. In weaving plain materials, such as calico, the
rows of weft-thread cross the rows of warp-thread at
right angles, interlacing one among another in a regular
manner, the cross-thread passing over one and under the
next of the long threads; in twilled materials the cross
thread (or weft) passes over one, and under two, three,
or four of the warp-threads, thus giving a kind of ribbed
appearance. But in making bobbin-net these threads are
made to twist round each other by the inter-
vension of two weft or cross threads. The machine by
which this twisting and interlacing are effected is one of
the most beautiful pieces of mechanism that the cotton-
manufacture presents, but it is too elaborate to be de-
scribed here. We may, however, show the principle on
which the meshes are formed, by the aid of the follow-
ing cuts.

Fig. 1 represents what would result if the perpen-
dicular threads were of inflexible wire; and Fig. 2 the
effect produced when they are, as in practice, of flexible
fibres. In each case the perpendicular threads, which
indeed form the warp, may be traced from top to bottom.
One of the weft-threads descends diagonally from right to
left, and then, after forming a selvage or edge, descends
from left to right; while at the same time the other
weft-thread descends diagonally first from left to right,
and afterwards from right to left. The weft-threads twist
round the warp-threads at the sides of every mesh, and
cross each other at the top and bottom of every mesh.

The net produced by machinery obtains different names,
according to the mode in which it is made. There were
some years ago two-plain net, square or luck-noticed net,
fish-net, platted net, &c.; but at present there is
weft-net, warp-net, and bob-
bin-net; these names are derived, not from their pecu-
liarity either in appearance or in use, but from the sort of
machines with which they are made. The quiltings, or
narrow strips of net, are made in broad sheets or widths, being connected together merely by a single thread, which is afterwards drawn out. The meshes in machine-made net vary from about twenty to thirty-six in an inch. The French are accustomed to make a kind of silk net called *simple press point*: when this is plain it is called *tulle*, and when ornamented *dentelle*.