

THE REVIVAL OF BURANO LACE.

THE brevity of the guide-books admits of only a passing allusion to the outlying islands of Venice. Hence, many an enlightened and curious traveler sees nothing beyond the churches and palaces, the pictures and the mysterious water-streets of the most wonderful city of the world. True, this traveler has been made very happy, and, ignorant of what is left unseen, goes upon his way in a contented spirit, not knowing that he has lost some of the best of Venice. For the initiated, however, these bits of dark green verdure scattered over the pale green lagoons have an indescribable charm. They seem to cluster around the old city like children about a mother. Some are so mature as to be graced by domes and spires. One, indeed, though long deserted, is truly older than the parent town, for who does not know that Torcello was the refuge of the people of the main-land from the



VIEW OF BURANO.



SAN FRANCESCO IN DESERTO.

conquering arms of the redoubtable Attila? The first place of Christian worship built by the refugees is still standing, a monument of early piety. Within the church is a great strange mosaic of the Last Judgment, which is said to have been an inspiration of the "Inferno" of Dante. San Francesco in Deserto is the lonely home of a few monks, who still remain in their silent retreat despite the stern decrees of United Italy. Murano is famous now, as it was three hundred years ago, for its glass factories, from the principal of which come the marvelous creations of taste and skill devised by Salviati, the world-renowned. The Lido is a long, narrow piece of land which forms a natural bulwark against the waves of the Adriatic, and preserves the city and lagoons from the shocks of stormy seas. On the island of San Lazzaro is the famous Arminian convent and school, whose printing-press sends forth to the world books in many languages, and where the relics and memory of Lord Byron are guarded even more jealously than in his own land. Santa Elena contains a deserted and partly ruined

Benedictine monastery. Among its bright flowers and beneath its tall, waving trees is the daily playground of the young heir to the throne of Italy, during the summer visits of his royal parents to Venice. Not far distant, looking westward, rise the high walls of the two islands of San Servolo and San Clemente, given up to those, the saddest of God's creatures, who yet must live, though bereft of all that makes life joyous; and farther on, a group of domes and spires, and lines of rose-colored wall, show the Venetian's final resting-place under the white crosses and dark cypress-trees of the island of San Michele.

Burano is one of the largest of these fairy islands that lift themselves, like those of a mirage, above the still lagoons. It lies about six miles from Venice. The inhabitants are fishermen and gardeners, who supply their excellent spoils and produce not only to the near city, but also to the markets of Trieste and distant Vienna: for the blue sea teems with fish, and the fair gardens are constantly enriched by the natural process that first formed them, and require none of those arti-



GONDOLA TO BURANO.

ficial aids which hasten the growth but impair the flavor of fruit and vegetables. That hardy race, the Buranelli, preserve more markedly than any other the customs and picturesque type of the ancient Venetian people. Here at least may be found a population of primitive ideas, with few requirements, patient and courageous under the heavy hardships of hunger and cold. Perhaps it were too much to say that "all the sons are brave and all the

turn should lead the workers into a more decorative class of productions.

No precise date can be assigned to the first appearance of lace, because the art of making lace, like all other arts, grew gradually until the latent skill given to men, like the statue within the marble block, became developed by that directing hand—the creative mind working in the creature—that is commonly known as time and circumstance.



THE WHARF AT BURANO.

daughters virtuous"; but it is certain that the men are stalwart and thrifty, and the women handsome and industrious. The occupation of many of the latter has again become, as it was in the old times, that of lace-making.

This might seem to be the natural bent of the women of a race of fishers. Lace is network on a finer scale, and we can easily conceive how the knitting of nets, first made strong, to assist in getting food, should teach them aptitude for intricate weaving, which in

Whether the love of ornament inherent in human nature excited first an imitation and then a rivalry of the embroideries in gold, silver, and colors brought to the shores of Italy by the Greeks, who took refuge there from the troubles of the Lower Empire, or whether lace is the direct descendant of gold and silver Saracenic ornament, may be left to the learned to decide. Of some facts we are sure: that the fabric we now call lace, fashioned laboriously by the needle, stitch by



WOMAN MAKING LACE. (DRAWN BY PRINCESS LOUISE, MARCHIONESS OF LORNE.)

stitch, was first made in the fifteenth century; that even then there were varieties of stitches and methods, and that to Venice belongs the invention of the two most perfect productions of this kind of hand-work—the *point coupé* and the Venetian point in relief. The received Venetian legend of the origin of flat Venetian point is as follows: A sailor youth, returning from southern seas, brought to his betrothed a bit of the sea plant familiarly known as “mermaid’s lace,” and called by Linnæus the

*Kalimedia opuntia*. The fond maiden saw with grief that the love-gift of her affianced was destined to crumble and perish, and, in order to preserve at least a record, succeeded after many efforts in copying it skillfully with her needle and thread. This graceful imitation of the sea-weed produced the charming fabric that was destined later to be counted among the precious possessions of emperors and kings. And not only as the inventor of the masterpieces of lace, but also in all other branches of the art, Venice was supreme and first. In the fifteenth century, she had learned her lesson; in the sixteenth, she was the teacher of Europe. Her laces were the most esteemed, her pattern-books the most numerous, her designs the most varied and original. Some of these last may still be studied in a work by Cesare Vecellio, nephew of Titian, preserved in the archives of the Ducal Palace, which was published in 1591, and dedicated to the illustrious lady Viena Vendramin.\* Pages might be filled with extracts from the various inventories of the German, French, and English courts describing Venetian lace, cited as royal gifts or purchases—from a wonderful cloak mentioned among the most precious possessions of Anne of France, in 1480, to a collar of unrivaled workmanship ordered for the coronation of the *grand monarque* during the minority of Louis XIV., that took two years to make, and was paid for with two hundred and fifty pieces of gold.

The art of lace-making probably attained its greatest perfection in Venice in the seventeenth century, and in 1664 we find the French ambassador to that republic reporting that the exports of the trade in lace amounted annually to 400,000 crowns, and that all the convents and the greater part of the poor families subsisted upon this work. Other countries then began to rival her excellence, and French workers, aided and directed by the genius of Colbert, made a successful struggle, first to imitate and then almost to equal the art of their unwilling instructor. After in vain endeavoring to exclude Venetian laces from France, Colbert adopted another expedient. By his order, a number of the most skillful work-women in lace were suborned from Venice, and distributed among the workshops already existing and in towns where he had established new ones. A correspondence of this sagacious minister, re-

\* This valuable book, as well as sixteen others of various ancient authors, has been reproduced by one of the most patriotic of modern Venetians, the publisher F. Ongania, who has used the heliotype process to bring works hitherto unattainable within the reach of moderate means.

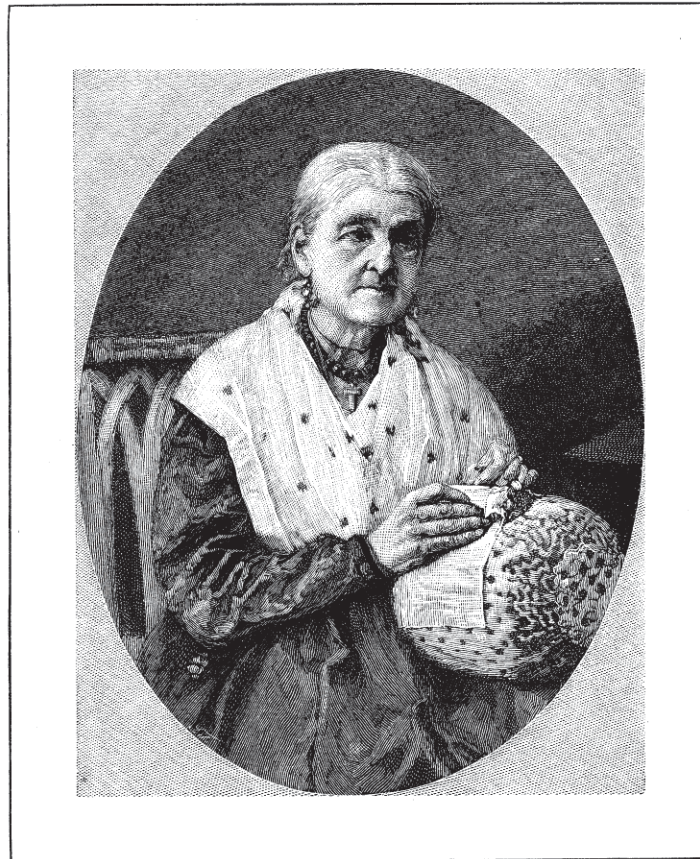


MARGARET OF SAVOY, QUEEN OF ITALY. (FROM PHOTOGRAPH FROM LIFE, BY FRATELLI VIANELLI, VENICE.)

cently published,\* gives interesting details of the opposition he encountered in introducing the foreign methods, even though the companies he established were liberally subsidized by the state and patronized by the king. But the result was the beautiful French laces of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and an industry that continues to the present time.

Among French laces, one of the most beautiful and, as all well-dressed women know,

be made during the Austrian occupation of Venice. Mrs. Bury Palliser, in her "History of Lace," tells us that in 1866 the natives of Burano appeared to retain no tradition of what was once their principal occupation. To-day, however, Burano lace and Venice point made by Venetian work-women in Burano, equaling the ancient fabric in fineness and finish, can again be purchased, and it is to draw attention to the



CENCIA SCARPAGLIOLA. (FROM PHOTOGRAPH FROM LIFE, BY ANT. PERINI, VENICE.)

perhaps the most desirable for adorning purposes, is the *point d'Alençon*. This is a direct imitation of Burano point, and has probably never quite equaled the original, as rare specimens of the old lace prove. Burano lace, once so sought after and celebrated, ceased to

\* Quoted in the 1876 edition of Mrs. Bury Palliser's work on "The History of Lace."

revival of this beautiful industry that the present article is written.

This revival of the art, after a cessation of nearly a century, has been effected by the exertions of the Countess Adriana Marcello and the Princess Giovannelli Chigi. These two ladies, who to their other graces add the charm of far-seeing charity, opened a school for lace-making in 1872, under the



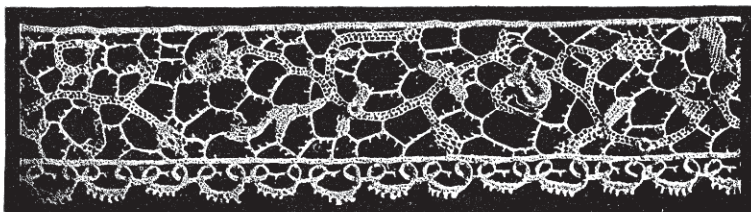
POINT D'ALENÇON, OR VIRGINAL BURANO POINT.

special protection of Queen Margaret, to whom they are ladies of honor. Several specimens of old Venetian lace were found in the possession of an aged woman of Burano named Cencia Scarpagliola, who had wrought them in her youth, and who "awoke one day to find herself famous." In spite of her great age, she was made directress of the work-room, being the only person competent for the office, and more than two hundred girls have been taught by her. The most important work they have yet completed is the reproduction of the laces of Pope Clement XIII Rezzonico, born in Venice in 1693. The originals are in the possession of the Queen, who, with the generosity that distinguishes her, lent them to be copied by the

school. Fifteen work-women accomplished the task in two years' time. One piece of lace, three meters long and fifty-five inches wide, valued at six thousand francs, was exhibited by the Burano school in Paris in 1876.

The Countess Marcello kindly answers, in the following letter, my request for some details of her personal knowledge of this interesting enterprise:

"It was during the winter of 1872 that the island of Burano, populated for the most part by wretched fishermen, found itself in such a state of misery that people died of hunger. Almost every year some families were reduced to extremity by the winter season, that prevents fishing, but the cold of the year 1872



ROSE POINT.

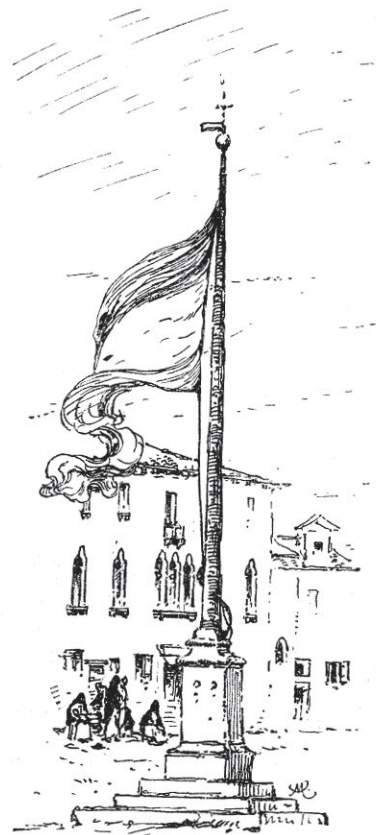
was more intense than usual, and the number of famine-stricken people was greatly increased. Recourse was had to the Holy Father, who sent a certain sum of money; His Majesty our King deigned to send help in the same way. The Venetians were also asked to aid, and some artists gave representations for the benefit of Burano. When all moneys received had been accounted for, it was found that, after relieving the most pressing necessities, there remained a surplus with which some work might be begun that would return a sure profit. The greater part of the surplus fund had been invested in a business that returned no profit—the business of making nets for the fishermen; but alas! it was useless to make goods for men who could not buy.

“Other persons, more far-seeing, among whom was Mr. Fambri, thought it was possible to revive the ancient industry of the Buranese women, who for centuries had worked as lace-makers, and produced the celebrated point-lace of Burano.

“It was then that the Princess Chigi Giovannelli and I were asked to become patronesses of this school, and it was afterward that our Queen did us the honor to become president of the institution. For my own part, I undertook to realize this project all the more willingly because my husband, when mayor of Venice, in 1858, had made several efforts



TWO LACE-MAKERS.



THE SCHOOL-HOUSE.

to revive this industry—efforts that had no results in consequence of the political events of 1859, which caused him to leave Venice for a time.

“When I began to work in the lace-school, I found there one Cencia Scarpagliola, an old woman, who alone had preserved the traditional science of lace-making, and, in spite of her seventy years, was able to work the celebrated Burano point-lace stitch. As Cencia did not understand the routine of teaching, Madame Anna Bellorio d’Este, an energetic and intelligent woman, mistress of the girls’ schools of Burano, was joined with her, and was taught by Cencia in the intervals of lesson hours. She then transmitted the instruction thus received to eight pupils, who, being paid small wages by the day, were the first islanders who were induced to learn lace-making. I immediately arranged that Bellorio should be replaced in the elementary schools, and that she should devote herself entirely to teaching the lace-making, and since that time she has always admirably directed our work-women. Now the eight scholars paid by the day to induce them to accept instruction have

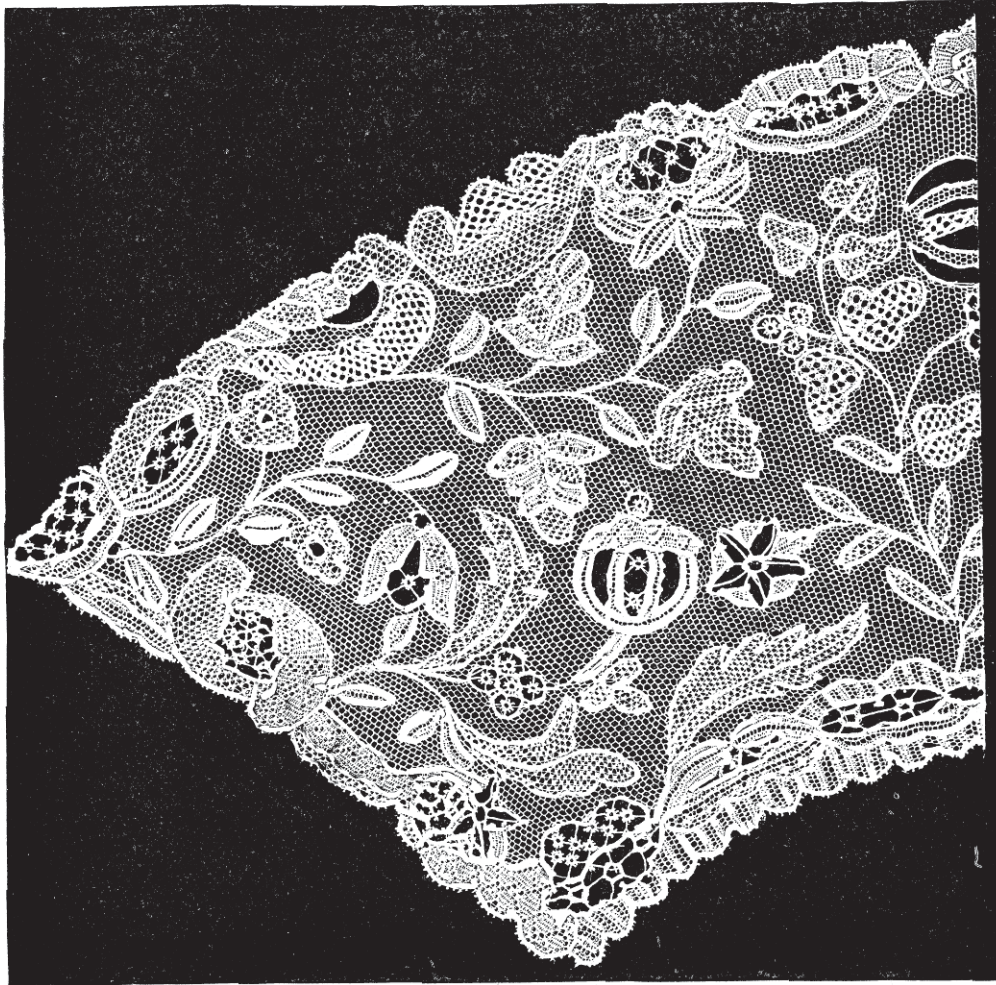


increased to three hundred and twenty work-women, paid, not by the day, but according to the quantity of the work produced.

"Living is cheap in Burano; a small apartment, where a young family can be lodged, may be bought for six hundred francs (one hundred and twenty dollars) or one thousand francs (two hundred dollars), and cases are not rare when a young work-woman has left

children that, much to his regret, he had to register nearly every year, last year but two children were born out of wedlock.

"Our school is not confined to making Burano point-lace only; it now undertakes to make any design or any kind of the different laces known as Burano point-lace, *point d'Alençon* lace, old Brussels needle-point, *point d'Argentin*, Venice point-lace, raised



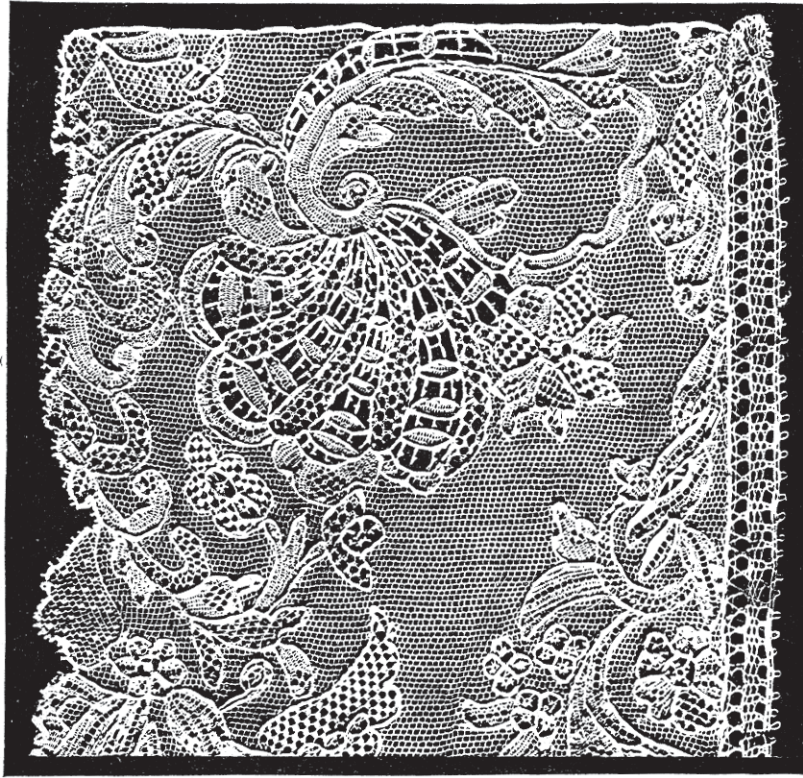
MODERN BURANO POINT—VENTAGLIO.

her wages for months untouched, until she has succeeded in accumulating the small sum necessary to purchase the modest dwelling that she takes as a dower to her husband. Almost all the young men of Burano seek our work-women as wives, and the *curé* of the parish told me, with great satisfaction, that last year the number of marriages was double what it had been for some time past, and that instead of the twenty-five illegitimate

point-lace—lower relief, raised point-lace—high relief, and *English point-lace*.

"In order to assist our scholars to understand thoroughly the different patterns of lace, I arranged that once a week a drawing-master should give them lessons in design.

"The three hundred and twenty work-women are divided into seven sections. Nothing is more useful than to insist that each girl should confine herself to one kind



ANCIENT BRUSSELS NEEDLE POINT.

of work, and be employed as much as possible on the same patterns; by following this plan each one attains perfection in her own especial department: she learns more quickly and earns more, and the school receives better work and more cheaply made, although the question of price is always relative.

"The first section employs fifty work-women, who trace out each pattern with a strong thread.

"The second section has sixty work-women, who make the foundation for the lace in point of Burano stitch.

"The third section has twenty-five work-women, who make the round-point stitch, the foundation of *point d'Alençon* lace.

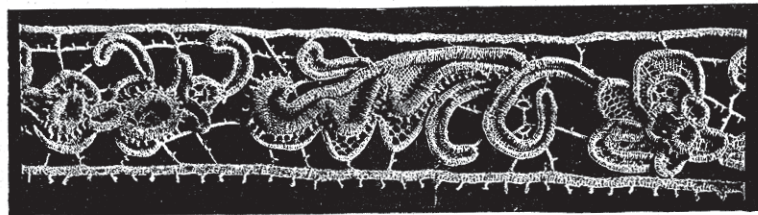
"The fourth section has one hundred

work-women, who make simple guipure lace, or guipure lace ornamented with flowers.

"The fifth section employs eighty work-women, who make the open-work and the joinings of all the lace. A girl must have learned the whole art to be admitted to this section.

"The sixth section employs ten work-women, who remove the patterns when the lace is finished, mend it if necessary, and make it ready for sale.

"The seventh section. Here are gathered and counted all our work-women who are married and have families, as it is impossible to exact from them the same punctuality and number of working hours required of the unmarried women. The first and the fifth



RAISED LEAF POINT.

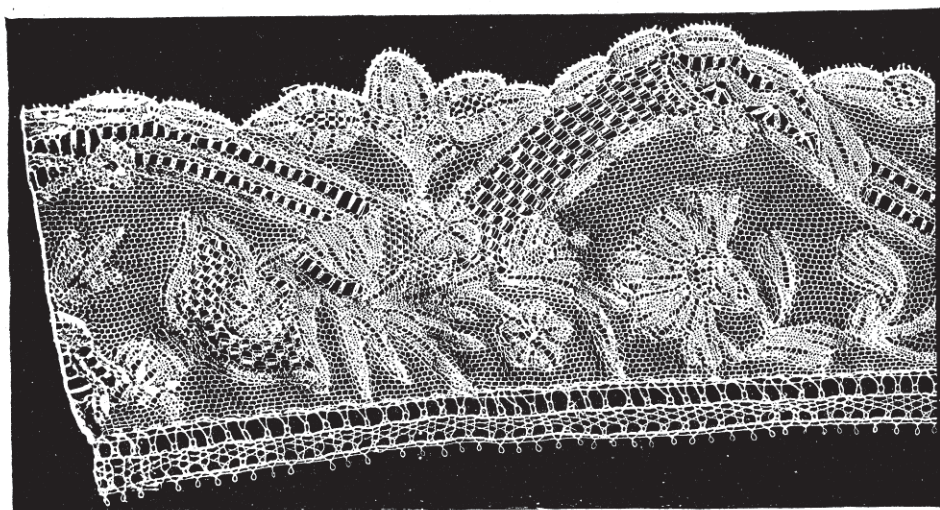


MODERN BURANO POINT.

sections are especially devoted to lessons in design."

These concise facts, from the pen of the amiable and philanthropic patroness, give a clear idea of how lace-work progresses in the present day on the once neglected little

island, and if any reader would see with her own eyes the perfection of the system and its products, she will pass a Venetian day most agreeably among the poor fishermen and their busy wives and daughters on the picturesque island of Burano.



ENGLISH POINT.