

RECENT HONITON LACE.

BY ALAN S. COLE.

THE examples of Honiton, or perhaps, more correctly speaking, of Devonshire lace, from which the illustrations to this paper have been taken, have, with the exception of that on this page, been made within the last five or six years. Although they illustrate various styles of ornament, the characteristic features of which are to be seen in laces of earlier date, they are not therefore indications of a new departure in design peculiar only to modern Devonshire lace-making, for in all living branches of minor artistic industries the influence of older upon later work is always traceable. The greatest genius, however strong his powers, is necessarily affected, consciously or unconsciously, by the circumstances in which he lives; and amongst those circumstances are the materials he studies with the object of perfecting himself in his art, so that to some extent he is always a copyist. Similar remarks apply to groups of lace-makers, who, generation after generation, assist in perpetuating, developing, or losing a reputation which fashion and commerce have acknowledged in a general way under the names of districts, towns, or villages inhabited by the groups of lace-makers. By the public at large, laces are spoken of, not by the name of the individual lace-makers, but by names such as Venetian, Alençon, Brussels, Mechlin, Valenciennes, Honiton, Irish, and so forth. These local titles for different sorts of lace are of comparatively little value as guides for determining and appreciating the special qualities of different laces. Years ago, when places were more insulated one from the other, and when there was less freedom and frequency of intercourse between them than now, the local title of a lace meant something more than it does at present. As a recognition that Honiton at one time held a foremost position

amongst the lace-making districts in Devonshire, the heading to this article has been adopted; but other places near Honiton have produced lace virtually identical in all respects with that made there. Without, then, at all depreciating the importance of

Honiton as an historic lace-making centre, I think that a better impression of the different variations of so-called "Honiton lace" may be obtained from Devonshire laces generally than from those which happen to have been made merely in Honiton.

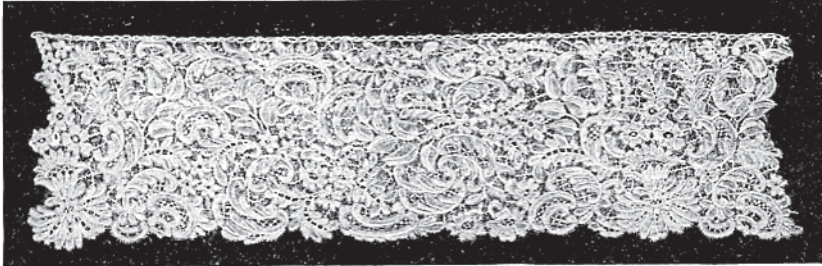
The oldest of the Devonshire, and indeed of English laces, appears to have been known as "Bone lace," a term arising probably from the use of bone bobbins. Many of these little bone bobbins are still in use with some lace-makers, and bear Christian names pricked or cut into the bones and coloured—it is said, by the lovers of the lace-makers. The "bone lace" was sold in considerable quantities at Honiton; and local dealers and makers of it became rich enough to leave pecuniary benefactions for the poor of the town. This bone lace consisted of wiry geometric borderings, similar to the Vandyke and tooth-shape trimmings produced in Italy with much greater variety of pattern during the sixteenth century. On monuments such as those of Lady Dodridge (A.D. 1614) in

Exeter Cathedral, and of Lady Pole (A.D. 1623) in Colyton Church, not far from Honiton, are indications of this wiry "bone lace." But it was not for making such that Honiton and Devonshire acquired any special fame. That was won through the excellence of a more filmy fabric, also produced by means of bobbins and pillows—a fabric in which varieties of floral ornaments, blossoms, leaves, flowers, and sprays or sprigs, are the elements of its pattern. The way of making these is very similar to that



BRUSSELS PILLOW-LACE, ABOUT 1680.

of Flemish laces, which in the middle of the seventeenth century were renowned as Point d'Angleterre and Point de Flandres. Broadly speaking, the Point d'Angleterre laces were distinguished



PILLOW-MADE GUIPURE LACE.
(From Branscombe, South Devon.)

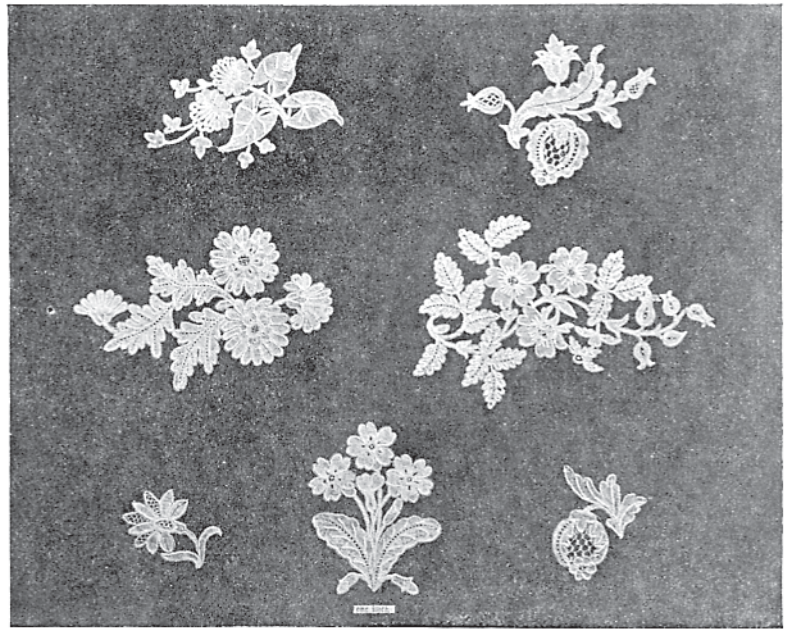
by grounds of small, regular meshes intervening between the details and devices of the entire pattern. On the other hand, the Point de Flandres were more generally spoken of as Guipures, on account of irregular small ties or bars which were used in them to hold the devices of the pattern together, thus presenting a much more open effect than the close-mesh grounds and floral scrolls of the Point d'Angleterre. An example of the former can be seen in the work on the handkerchief on p. 32, and of the "Point de Flandres" in the second illustration on p. 33.

About the time of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, 1685, Brussels was high in renown for making floral-patterned laces, like that represented on p. 30. Many refugees, amongst whom were lace-makers from the French Netherlands and from France, came over to England and settled in different parts of the country, and it is generally considered that Devonshire lace-making then received an impulse from these Flemish immigrants or refugees; so much so, indeed, that such lace as that on p. 30, which has all the characteristics of late seventeenth century Brussels pillow or bobbin lace, has been claimed to be of Honiton or Devonshire make. The flowers and leaves in it were made separately, and were then joined together by means of little intervening ties or bars. This same characteristic is traceable in the first illustration on this page, which is a piece of bobbin lace made lately at Branscombe, and is typical of a fair quality of so-called "Honiton lace" or guipure. But more like Honiton guipure

is the "Duchesse" guipure of Belgium, much of which is made at Bruges. All these kindred "guipure" pillow-laces were made in the same way—that is to say, in separate blossoms, leaves, sprays, and other "objects," which have to be subsequently arranged into a pattern and then joined together. Some of the guipures were of more delicate texture than others, on account of the finer thread used in making them; and in some, the forms of the separate objects were better drawn than in others. As a class, the details in the foreign guipures are far better drawn, shaped, and arranged together

than in the English. The sources from which many Honiton lace-makers take their flowers and sprigs and the plans or schemes of their patterns are usually those which are nearest to hand; such, for instance, as the flowered table-cloth purchased for domestic use from the village Howell and James, or the paper rich with extravagant foliations and amorphous blossoms which the local Gillow has hung on cottage walls.

In 1887, when I was commissioned to report on the condition of the Honiton lace industry,* I found

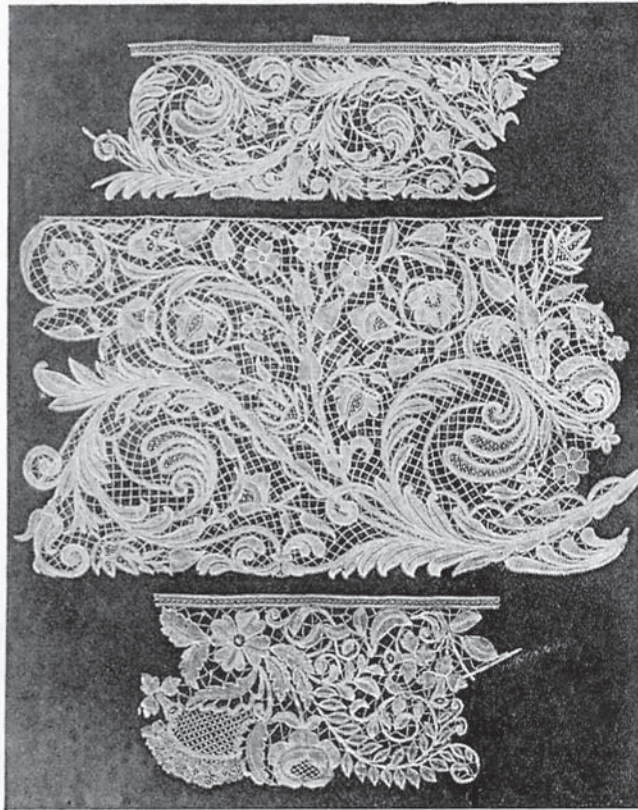


HONITON SPRIGS.

(Made by Mrs. Fowler, from recent Designs by Miss Emily Anderson, of Cork.)

that the artistic side of the industry was but

* Return to an Address of the Honourable the House of Commons, dated 20th March, 1888, for "Copy of Report of Mr.



HONITON GUIPURE PILLOW-LACE, IN THE STYLE OF "POINT DE FLANDRES."

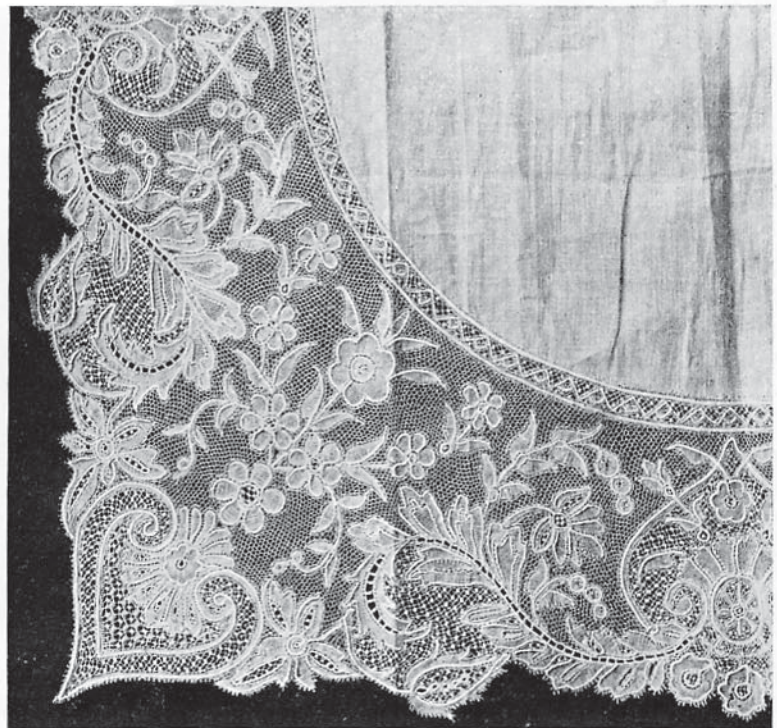
(Made under the direction of Mrs. Fowler, of Honiton, from Designs by a Nun of the Convent of Poor Clares, Kenmare, co. Kerry.)

poorly tended. For instance, at the little fishing village of Beer, a local dealer—an intelligent woman—told me she tried a "new pattern sometimes." As she said, "We sees a new wall-paper and prick a pattern off it, changing a bit here, or leave a little, or add a little. But such novelties do not prove successful; the gentlefolks calls it 'machine,' and the sale is a haphazardly thing." The same condition obtained at most of the other places I visited; but, fortunately, there were exceptions, and Mr. Cuthbert Peek, who has recently been taking a close interest in the Devonshire lace industry, decided to make an experiment or two at these exceptional centres, where the appreciation of pattern-making was on a higher level than

Alan Cole, Commissioner from the South Kensington Museum, on the Present Condition and Prospects of the Honiton Lace Industry." Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed.

elsewhere in the neighbourhood. The earliest of these experiments was the production of simple "sprigs," better shaped than those commonly made. (See p. 31.) The drawings for these were made, curiously enough, not in Exeter or Honiton, or any Devonshire home of the arts of design, but in Cork, by Miss Emily Anderson, of the Crawford Municipal School of Art there.

Mrs. Fowler, a foremost manufacturer of Honiton and Devonshire laces, found the necessary talent for pricking-off Miss Anderson's drawings and for making the lace "sprigs" from them. It is quite evident, I think, that, with details such as these sprigs, "guipure" of better style than that represented in the first illustration on p. 31 could be made. Another experiment, also, I believe, carried out through Mrs. Fowler, was the making of the three specimens of guipures represented on this page. The designs for these were done at Mr. Peek's request by one of the nuns of the Convent of Poor Clares, Kenmare, County Kerry. From the same convent came the drawing for a handkerchief-border of dainty gauzy lace, also made at or near Honiton. All the flowers, leaves, and scrolling sprays are of pillow and bobbin make, and the mesh-ground is done subsequently with the needle. Needlepoint lace-making, however, has not been a speciality in

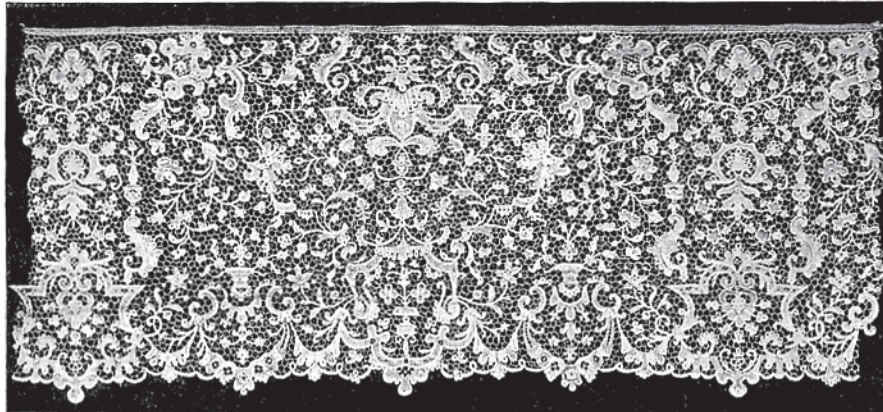


CORNER OF A HANDKERCHIEF, OF PILLOW-LACE, IN THE STYLE OF BRUSSELS "POINT D'ANGLETERRE."

(Made at Honiton by Mrs. Fowler for Mr. Cuthbert Peek, from a Design by a Nun of the Convent of Poor Clares, Kenmare, co. Kerry.)

Devonshire. And yet there seems to be little reason why it should not be. For in the illustration herewith we have part of a flounce of well-adapted Louis XIV. ornament of the style of Berain's designs, which

pence or tenpence a day which an adult lace-maker may now only chance to earn after working for ten or twelve hours a day. But these dames' schools for lace-making have virtually ceased to exist. The requirements of the Education Act have helped to kill them, and in 1887 a general opinion in Devonshire amongst the lace-workers was that the "book learning" and elementary schools had almost extinguished the trade. Children are kept at school and learn to grow "proudlie and above work, I think," said one dealer; "our country will come to feel it some day, if they don't now, what with our children being put to so much schooling and not



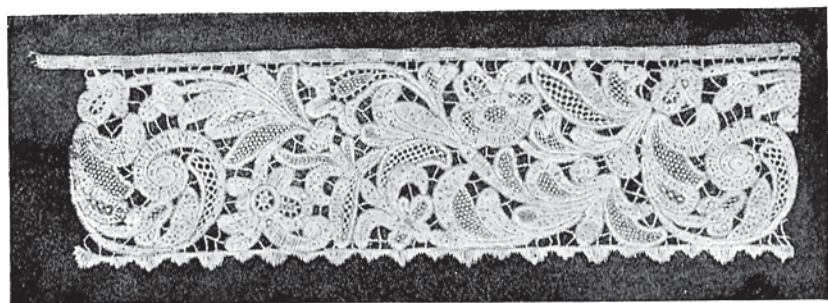
NEEDLEPOINT LACE FLOUNCE IN THE STYLE OF 17TH CENTURY "POINT DE VENISE," OR "POINT DE FRANCE."

(Made under the direction of the late Mrs. Treadwin, of Exeter.)

the late Mrs. Treadwin, of Exeter, caused to be wrought in admirable needlepoint lace. So complete was the workmanship of it, so excellent the quality of the thread, and the ivory tint which pervaded the fabric, that at first I thought it was a well-preserved specimen of Point de Venise or Point de France. Notwithstanding such a high standard of achievement as is implied in the production of this flounce, Mrs. Treadwin considered that lace-making in Devonshire and Honiton is dying and doomed, "unless arrangements are made for training a generation of young lace-makers" to produce lace from well-drawn and well-composed patterns based on the best traditions, and not from deteriorated traditional patterns.

In former years, children in villages were taught lace-making in dames' schools. These dames' schools were not perhaps what they should have been. Children of eight years of age were taken from the village school and put into the lace school, their hours being from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. in the summer, and from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. in the winter. The girls had to stick ten pins a minute or 600 in the hour, which, as will be understood by anyone who has watched a lace-maker sticking pins into her pillow and plaiting and twisting the threads of her bobbins about them, meant that a definite quantity of lace had to be made in the day. They could earn about sixpence a day. For beginners this was not a bad rate of wages, and certainly better than the nine-

brought up, as they used to be, to a trade or occupation." Since 1887 the Government has initiated measures to assist the development of "manual work" in elementary schools, and of technical instruction at various centres. And there is now some talk in Devonshire of adopting a system of technical instruction in lace-making in elementary schools. Some small groups of lace-makers at Beer and elsewhere have already been set to work by Miss Bowden and Miss Constance Blount, to produce a substantial tape-like lace which is a good deal in the style of Italian and Cretan peasant lace of the seventeenth century. In the opinion of experts in the trade, lace well made from good designs will always command a sale. It may therefore perhaps be expected that Honiton lace-making is not likely to become extinct, and that,



PILLOW-MADE REPRODUCTION OF A 17TH CENTURY "POINT DE FLANDRES."

(Produced under the direction of the late Mrs. Treadwin, of Exeter.)

if undertaken upon better lines than those of some years ago, it may regain its prestige and prove to be a satisfactory wage-earning art-industry to an agricultural and fishing community like that of Devonshire.