LACE

Lace [M. Eng. las, from O. Fr. las > Mod. Fr. lase; Ital. laccio; Span. laza < Lat. laxa, loose, knot]; an ornamental openwork of thread, twisted, plaited, or woven into patterns. Itself comparatively modern, lace is derived from two most ancient kinds of work, netting and embroidery, the former of which was used by the Egyptians to ornament the borders of some festival garments; indeed, the network of blue beads found on mummies may, as it was made with the needle, be regarded as a sort of lace. The Greeks and Romans bordered their robes with embroidery, called, when of superior quality, opus Phrygianum, from the skill with which it was executed by Phrygian workers. Among early Christians it was customary for women to wear veils during public worship, and writers of the second century complained that too often those coverings ministered rather to vanity than to modesty, being frequently of netting interwoven with gold or silver, through which the face was visible. Anglo-Saxon embroidery, opus Anglicaenum, was esteemed even in Rome; the cope and maniple of St. Cuthbert, found in his coffin, and still preserved at Durham, are good specimens of this work.

Lace may be divided into two principal classes—point and pillow lace, the former being of much the greater antiquity. We cannot decide when point was first made, so very gradually was it evolved from netting and embroidery, with which it is often confounded in old records. The Italians probably derived it from Byzantium, since its earliest development may be traced to Venice, Genoa, and other towns engaged in commerce with the Greek empire. The oldest point is of two kinds—lacié, or point compté (counted stitch), and cut-work (point coupé). Lacié usually consisted of netted squares, made in the ordinary way on a mesh, then joined with the needle, and darned or embroidered in a pattern, like the modern guipure d’art; or designs cut out of linen were laid on the netting and secured to it by embroidery. The open ground, again, was sometimes formed by drawing threads in a piece of linen and fastening them with the needle where they crossed each other. For cut-work, threads were stretched netwise across a piece of linen, called quintá, from the place of its manufacture, and a pattern was made by sewing round with buttonhole stitch those parts of the linen intended to remain, and cutting the rest away. By degrees, skilful workers arrived at
making the thick part entirely with the needle, using variations of two stitches (Figs. 1 and 2), similar to those in modern point. The name "cut-work," though inappropriate, was long retained, and as late as 1640 was applied to Italian lace by John Taylor, the Water Poet, in his Prayse of the Needle, embroidery, laces, and cut work were often combined in piece, squares of darned netting alternating with squares of cut and embroidered linen; and this work, which was used chiefly for large articles, such as altar-cloths and altar-cloths, was sometimes whitewashed or embossed, sometimes varied with gold, silver, or colored threads. The earliest pattern-books extant date from the sixteenth century, and are extremely rare. The text of "white work, alias cut-work, made beyond the seas." Stubbins, in his denunciation of "ruffs," declares them to be "clogged with gold, silver, or silk lace of stately price, wrought all over with needle-work, speckled and sparkled with stones on the somme, with the marmo, the stars, and many other antiquities strange to behold." For those much-reviled yet long-trumpeted articles of dress, pillow-lace, being lighter than point, was a favorite edge. This work, usually superseded by lace invented by Barbara Utting, wife of a master-miller of St. Annaberg, in Saxony, is by Joseph Séguin pronounced of Italian origin. From Italy," says he," a knowledge of the art passed into France, whence it was acquired by the lace-makers of Flanders." Be that as it may, Belgium is now the special home of this beautiful fabric. The lace-pillow is a round or oval board forming the base of a hard cushion; the worker places it upon her knees, lays on it a strip of parchment pricked with holes which indicate a lace-pattern, and sticks a pin through each hole so that its point enters the pillow. The thread for making the lace is wound on bobbins, small pieces of wood, bone, ivory or about the circumference of an ordinary lead-pencil, having round their upper ends a groove or neck to receive the thread; by the twisting and crossing of these threads, the ground or mesh is made by plaiting (Fig. 3) or twisting the threads (Fig. 4); the pattern, technically called gimp, by weaving or clothing (Fig. 5). These figures, as also 1 and 2, represent the stitches considerably magnified. A large number of bobbins is needed, as many as 1,200 being sometimes employed on one cushion. Those not immediately in use hang over the front of the cushion, each by its own head, which is so looped as not to become unwound. The leading lines of the pattern are sometimes marked by pins with colored heads, and the undulating threads are wound round colored bobbins. Early pillow-lace, like contemporary point, was of stiff design, and may be compared to the more formal of modern court-edge. Toward the close of the sixteenth century lace of all kinds changed from the geometrical to the flowing style, as may be seen by comparison of Holbein’s pictures with those of Vandyke. And the latter year it was more generally and profusely used that Queen Elizabeth’s death 3,000 lace-trimmed habits were found in her wardrobe. Charles I. wore hunting-dresses adorned with rich point. In France, and all countries where French fashion-laws were obeyed, lace during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was used lavishly for nearly all articles of dress. The falling collars and cravats which succeeded ruffs were either made of lace or deeply bordered with it. Ladies wore lace head-dresses, lace flounces, ruffles of lace at the elbow, aprons frilled with or composed entirely of lace. Gentlemen had lace cuffs or laces (called pleureurs, weepers), fall-fronts, and thus, it was said, facilitated cheating at cards; they wore lace-trimmed garters, deep frills of lace at the knee, lace roses in shoes, even quiltings of lace to fill up the wide skirt-tops that were fashionable about 1695. Chairs, beds, and cradle-furniture were made of rich lace, and it was used for curtains, coverlets, even for bathing wrappers. Great sums were spent upon lace, and as it was nearly all brought from Italy, Venice and Genoa were enriched with the fortunes of French nobles. For this reason its importation was, between 1620 and 1660, forbidden by many edicts, which, however, had little effect except to increase the number of these, La Révolte des Paysans (The Rebellion of the Laces) is specially valuable, since it names every kind of lace known at the time. Soon after the mines of 1660 the makers of Venice, differing considerably from it, was by Louis XIV., called point de France, and being patronized by that monarch, soon became indispensable to all courtiers. In 1685 a company was organized with the monopoly of sale for ten years, during which time the shareholders received over and over again the amount of their original investment. The manufacture of point de France, though neglected, like every kind of French industry, by the suppression of the Edict of Nantes, flourished until the Revolution, when nearly all demand for lace ceased, and many Alençon workers, having ministered to aristocratic taste, fell into the fate of their high-born patrons. It was revived by Napoleon I., and there exist here and there fragments of a suite of bed-furniture powdered with the imperial bees, which was made for him at immense cost. Venice point is no longer worked, except by skillful reproducers of old lace. The raised kind was especially beautiful, and had the appearance of carving or bas-relief, the outlines of the patterns being worked over thick rolls of cotton. The flowers were filled in with delicate lace-stitches (technically called nœuds) and connected by branches, or bars, of exquisite lightness varied by little stars and picots, or pearl loops. A similar piece was made in Spanish convents and devoted to church purposes, such as altar-furniture, vestments, and the dresses of images. In the island of Cephalonia much Italian point of geometrical design has been found in tombs and tombs. The pattern is printed on pieces of green parchment about 10 inches long, each segment numbered in its order; the pattern is then pricked upon the parchment, which is stretched to a piece of coarse linen framed double. The outline of the pattern is traced by two threads fixed by small stitches passed with another needle and thread through the parchment and its lining. The ground is next worked in fine réseau (net) backward and forward at right angles to the border; the
flowers are worked in, and the various modes or fillings are introduced. The threads which unite lace, parchment, and linen are next cut by passing a razor between the folds of the linen, and the many segments are joined by an invisibly joined stitch called assemblage. Point d’Alençon is the only lace in which horseshoe is introduced along the edge to give firmness to the cordonnet. The horseshoe has the disadvantage of shrinking apt to shrink in washing, and thus destroy the beauty of the point. Until the Revolution there was made at Argentan a point resembling that of ALENÇON, but with heavier florishment and a large ground of large horizontal meshes worked over with buttonhole stitch. The art of making this lace, which was very strong and effective, is entirely lost. Pillow-lace is either worked in one piece on the pillow, in which case it can not be of any great width, or is made in separate flowers, afterwards connected by brides or applied on net. Of the latter kind are Brussel, Honiton, and guipure de Bruges. The best Brussels lace is made of white linen; this process, besides being injurious to health, renders the lace liable to turn black on exposure to heat or sea-air, in which case it can never be cleaned. Honiton, the most valuable English lace, is made almost entirely in Devonshire seacoast. The flowers, generally in nature, are of fine wool or cloth-stitch, a thinner thread marking the outlines. They are either applied on net or by brides, which, like the pattern, are worked on the pillow; needle-stitches are occasionally introduced. Guipure de Bruges, sometimes called duchesse lace, resembles Honiton, its springs being united by brides.

Of the many laces made in one piece on the pillow, Valenciennes is the most esteemed. Before the French Revolution it was worked chiefly at Valenciennes, and was called, on account of its durability, everlasting. It was made in collars, the damp air of which favored the use of extremely fine thread, and was ruinous to the sight, many women becoming blind before thirty. At present it is manufactured only at Baillieu, in France, and in several Belgian towns, Ypres furnishing the widest kinds, which cost sometimes as much as £20 per meter. It is a very even lace, one-sizes thread forming both ground and pattern, and, as it bears washing remarkably well, is a suitable trimming for white garments. Somewhat resembling Valenciennes, it is also used for trimming white articles, but its ground is lighter, and the flowers are outlined by a flat shiny thread which looks like embroidery. Pillow-lace, less expensive than Valenciennes, is made at Lille and Arras, and large quantities are manufactured in Normandy, Lorraine, and Auvergne. Coarse pillow-edgings, used chiefly by peasant-women for their costume head-dresses, are manufactured in Bohemia, Sweden, Denmark and some parts of Germany; more delicate kinds are also made in those countries, but not in very great quantities. In England Beverleyshire, Buckinghamshire, and Northamptonsire were formerly celebrated for edgings resembling those of Lille, and called baby lace from being used chiefly for infants’ caps, but various causes having lessened the demand for this lace, the workers now generally make Maltese or Cluny guipure. The term d’Alençon is applied only to a kind made of carpinus (thin strips of parchment or vellum), round which gold, silver, or silk thread was twisted. It was worked either with a needle or on a pillow, the pattern being outlined with carpinus and filled in with stitches, and was very perishable, as the vellum was affected by damp. Thread guipures, resembling the modern Cluny, Maltese, and Russian, were made in Italy and Flanders. Some specimens of Russian lace, now in the South Kensington Museum, are remarkable for bold and correct design. Black lace, both white and black, is either worked entirely on the pillow, like Chantilly, or has pillow flowers applied on silk net. Black Chantilly lace is now made chiefly at Bayeux. Grammont, in Belgium, produces black lace, and large quantities are manufactured in Spain, particularly at Alvaro, where 18,000 are employed. White batiste mantillas are worn by Spanish ladies at bull-fights. Irish lace comprises crochet guipure, very fine tatting, Carrickmacross, a kind of cut-work, and embroidery upon machine net, called Limerick lace. The last-named variety is suitable for large articles, such as veils and flounces. Worsted, mohair, and yak laces, used of late years for dress-trimming, are chiefly at Le Puy. Greek and Italian peasants work also—fibres into a lace which, though pretty, has the disadvantage of not washing; sometimes, however, it is dyed black, and thus rendered more useful. A natural lace is furnished by the Latielles, a leafy, white, deciduous tree, bearing white flowers and large smooth leaves; its inner bark may, after maceration in water, be separated into fine layers resembling net. Gold and silver laces, employed for unifying a frame by hand, like Limerick lace, or by a adaptation of the Jacquard apparatus to the net-machine. When the machine-worked pattern consists of separate sprigs, stars, or dots, the thick pattern thread (called gimp) is carried from the one to the other, and after splitting away. The turn to working is confided to lace-menders, who exactly replace the damaged meshes. Nottingham is the chief seat of the English machine-lace trade.

English machine-net was formerly smuggled into France, but the French now excel in the finer kinds, and show special taste in their patterns. Their principal lace-making towns are Calais, CAMBRAY, LYONS, ST.-OMER, LILLE, ST.-QUENTIN, and manufacturing beautiful photographs of old and modern hand-made lace. See F. Bury Pilkis, History of Lace (London, 1865, 8vo); Mrs. Hailstone, Designs for Lace-making (1870, 1st); V. Touche, The Hand and Point Lace (1871); Madame Goubaud, Guipure d’Art (1870).