

LACE

Lace [M. Eng. *las*, from O. Fr. *laz* > Mod. Fr. *lacs* : Ital. *laccio* : Span. *lazo* < Lat. *laqueus*, noose, 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 Anglicanum*, 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 can not 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—*lacis*, or *point compté* (counted stitch), and cut-work (*point coupé*). *Lacis* 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 *quintin* 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, skillful 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

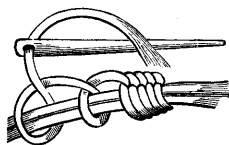


FIG. 1.

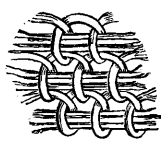


FIG. 2.

Water Poet, in his *Prayse of the Needle*. Embroidery, lacis, and cut-work were often combined in one 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 coverlets and altar-cloths, was sometimes white or unbleached, sometimes varied with gold, silver, or colored threads. The earliest pattern-books extant date from the sixteenth century, and are extremely rare. The best known is that of Vinciolo, a Venetian (about 1612), who gave new designs, besides republishing many from older books. Among these are *Le Livre nouveau des Patrons de Lingerie* (Berlin, 1525); *Knitting and Lace Patterns*, Hans Sibmacher (1597, reprinted at Vienna 1866), having a curious frontispiece representing a workroom where an aged woman is directing several young pupils; *La Pratique de l'Ariguille industrielle*, Mignerak (1605). The designs in these and contemporary works on the same subject are either geometrical or attempts at depicting sacred, historical, or allegorical scenes. Sibmacher gives St. George and the Dragon to be worked in lacis; Mignerak shows how the seasons, the elements, the death of Lucretia, etc., may be more or less adequately represented with the needle. In the South Kensington Museum, London, a large piece of lacis in many compartments contains in each a Bible picture wrought on a netted ground. As pattern-books were expensive and easily damaged, it was usual for ladies, in the times when needle-industry ranked as a cardinal female virtue, to preserve designs and stitches by working lace-samplers or sam-cloths, which are kept as heirlooms in many families.

In the sixteenth century lace became a very general ornament of the dress of both men and women, and it is frequently mentioned in royal edicts and accounts: "8 peces of yolowe (yellow) lace were bought for Henry VIII. at a cost of 5s. 4d." A sumptuary law of Queen Mary forbade the wearing of "white woorkes, alias cut-woorkes, made beyond the seas." Stubbes, in his denunciation of "ruffes," declares them to be "clogged with gold, silver, or silk lace of stately price, wrought all over with needle-work, speckled and sparkled here and there with the sonne, the moone, the starres, and many other antiquities straunge to beholde." For those much-reviled yet long-triumphant articles of dress, pillow-lace, being lighter than point, was a favorite edging. This work, usually supposed to have been invented by Barbara Uttmann, wife of a master miner 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, or ivory 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 the lace is formed. The ground or mesh is made by plaiting (Fig. 3) or twisting

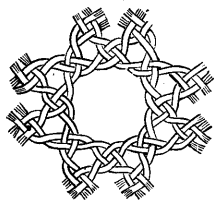


FIG. 3.

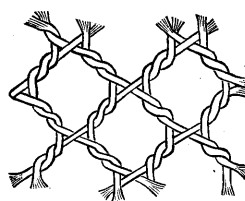


FIG. 4.

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 thread, 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 gimp threads are wound upon colored bobbins. Early pillow-lace, like contemporary point, was of stiff design, and may be compared to the more formal of modern crochet edgings. 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 every year it was more generally and profusely worn. At 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. Gentleman had lace cuffs or ruffles (called *pleureuses*, weepers) which fell over the hand, 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 quillings of lace to fill up the wide boot-tops that were fashionable about 1662. Infants' robes, caps, and cradle-furniture were made of rich lace, and it was used for curtains, for 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 inspire numerous satires: of these, *La Révolte des Passements* (The Rebellion of the Laces) is specially valuable, since it names every kind of lace known at the time. Soon after the edict of 1660 the minister Colbert, resolved that France should have a lace-manufacture of its own, sent to Italy for workers, and established them near Alençon, where they instructed a number of French girls in the art of making point. Alençon lace, which, though derived from that of Venice, differed considerably from it, was by Louis XIV. called *point de France*, and being patronized by that monarch, soon became indispensable to all his courtiers. In 1665 a company was organized with the monopoly of its sale for ten years, during which time the shareholders received over and over again the amount of their original investments. The manufacture of point de France, though affected, like every kind of French industry, by the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, flourished until the Revolution, when nearly all demand for lace ceased, and many Alençon workers, having ministered to aristocratic luxury, shared 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 *modes*) and connected by brides, or bars, of exquisite lightness varied by little stars and picots, or pearl loops. A similar lace 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 sold under the name of Greek lace. Point d'Alençon, the most costly and complicated of needle-laces, is made in small segments and by twelve different workers, each of whom has her special province. The pattern is printed off 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 stitched to a piece of coarse linen folded double. The outline of the pattern is traced out by two threads fixed by small stitches passed with another needle and thread through the parchment and its linen lining. The ground is next worked in fine *réseau* (net) backward and forward at right angles to the border; the

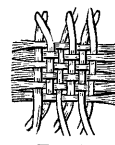


FIG. 5.

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 invisible stitch called *assemblage*. Point d'Alençon is the only lace in which horsehair is introduced along the edge to give firmness to the cordonnet. The horsehair has the disadvantage of being apt to shrink in washing, and thus impair the beauty of the point. Until the Revolution there was made at Argentan a point resembling that of Alençon, but with heavier flowers and a bride ground of large hexagonal 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 cushion, in which case it can not be of any great width, or is made in separate flowers, afterward connected by brides or applied on net. Of the latter kind are Brussels, Honiton, and guipure de Bruges. The best Brussels lace is made of wonderfully fine thread, the flax for which is grown in Brabant and steeped at Courtrai, the Lys water being very clear. This thread is spun in cellars, since contact with dry air causes it to break; a ray of light is thrown on it, but the spinner is guided chiefly by touch, and stops her wheel when she feels the slightest unevenness. The number of expert spinners being small, and their work tedious and unhealthful, real Brussels thread is very expensive, costing from 20,000 to 50,000 francs per pound. Machine-made thread is therefore generally used, but it has never attained the fineness of that spun by hand. The most costly Brussels lace has a fine needle-made ground, called point à l'aiguille, rarely used except for royal trousseaux; the pillow-made ground, though much less expensive and durable, is also of great value, and is commonly replaced by fine machine net made at Brussels for the purpose. The flowers are sometimes worked with the needle, but more frequently on the pillow; a fine cordonnet marks the outlines of the pattern, which is formed in a variety of beautiful modes. A piece of Brussels lace passes through seven different hands, each worker having her own department, and knowing nothing of the intended effect, which is decided by the head of the establishment. Lace-making is taught in schools, of which there are over 900 throughout Belgium, many being attached to convents. Brussels flowers coming soiled from the lace-makers' hands are often prepared for sale by means of white lead; 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 along the Devonshire seacoast. The flowers, generally from nature, are of fine woven or cloth-stitch, a thicker thread marking the outlines. They are either applied on net or connected 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 sprigs 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 cellars, 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 Bailleul, in France, and in several Belgian towns, Ypres furnishing the widest kinds, which cost sometimes as much as £80 per meter. It is a very even lace, one-sized 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 Holland, Sweden, Denmark, and some parts of Germany; more delicate kinds are also made in those countries, but not in very great quantities. In England Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, and Northamptonshire 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 fine lace, the workers now generally make Maltese or Cluny guipure. The term *guipure*, now used for any rich lace, was anciently applied only

to a kind made of *cartisane* (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 cartisane 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.

Blonde lace, both black and white, 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 Almagro, where 12,000 workers are employed. White blonde mantillas are worn by Spanish ladies at bull-fights. Irish lace comprises crochet guipure, very fine tating, Carrick-macross, 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 made chiefly at Le Puy. Greek and Italian peasants work aloefibers 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 *Lagetta lintearia*, a lofty West Indian tree with 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 uniforms and court dress, are made either of very fine wire, or silk covered with a fine flat thread of gold, silver, or silver gilt. Machinery is now generally used in the manufacture, which is carried on in London, Belgium, Italy, and France.

The first machine-net, made at Nottingham about 1760 upon the ordinary stocking-frame, was a looped fabric, woven with a single thread, and resembling an open knitting both in appearance and liability to ravel. Improvements in its manufacture were introduced by Hammond, Robert Frost, Flint, and others, but the object of inventors—an imitation of the firm three and six sided meshes of pillow-work—was not attained until 1809, when Heathcot, after long watching a woman at her pillow, and carefully unraveling some pieces of pillow-lace, found out how to make twist bobbinet. (See NETS.) Lace patterns are worked in bobbinet either in a frame by hand, like Limerick lace, or by an 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 one to the other, and afterward cut away. Net torn in the 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, Cambrai, Lyons, St.-Omer, Lille, St.-Quentin, and Caen. Embroidery on machine-net is done in Paris. Every kind of pillow-lace is imitated by machinery, and so accurately as to deceive a superficial or ignorant observer. In this, as in all work, that done by hand even though faulty, has a character which no machine can supply; and the very evenness and flatness of imitation lace make it of little value from an artistic point of view. J. Séguin's work, already cited, contains fifty beautiful photographs of old and modern hand-made lace. See F. Bury Palisser, *History of Lace* (London, 1865, 8vo); Mrs. Hailstone, *Designs for Lace-making* (1870, fol.); V. Touche, *The Handbook of Point Lace* (1871); Madame Goubaud, *Guipure d'Art* (1870).