

## THE STORY OF IRISH LACE.

By Mrs. HART.

Lace-making in Ireland has had a variable history. The industry has from time to time flourished under the patronage of the great and fashionable, or from the impetus given by the poverty and distress of the poor, but it has declined again when incentives to work have been removed.

We have no records by which to fix the period when lace was first made in Ireland, but we read that great encouragement was given the industry toward the middle of the eighteenth century by a club of Irish patriots called the Dublin society. Acting under the advice of Lady Arabella Denny, money prizes were given by the society for the reproductions of Brussels lace, Dresden point, and bone lace, as pillow lace was then called. At this time there was a strong national feeling in Ireland, and patriotism was extended even to lace, and we are told that enthusiastic young Irishmen, anxious to stimulate home manufactures, refused to toast any lady or to consider her beautiful if she wore French lace or foreign fopperies. Ladies, on their part, exerted themselves to found schools, and to have children taught the art of making lace. Gold and silver lace was at this time so well made in Ireland that in 1778 the Irish parliament passed an act prohibiting the importation of such manufactures from England or any foreign port. But troublous times came upon Ireland. The Dublin society ceased to exist. Lady Arabella Denny died in 1792 at the age of 85, and the lace industry of Ireland languished and expired for the lack of support and encouragement. It was not till the third decade of the present century that the severe distress of repeated potato famines, and the terrible suffering, the starvation and death caused by the great famine of 1846-7, induced many ladies, whose hearts were stirred by the misery around them, to make serious efforts to revive the Irish lace industry, and to try and find in it the means of support for a starving people. How they succeeded will be told in the following pages.

## IRISH LACES.

Irish laces may be divided into Carrickmacross, Limerick, Youghal point, Innishmaccsaint point, and crochet.

(1) Carrickmacross—This lace is of two kinds—applique and guipure. In applique the pattern is made of the finest muslin or cambric, which is applied to net by point lace stitches. In guipure the flowers are attached by brides, into which are worked characteristic little loops or projecting spurs. (Fig. 1.) When well made, applique Carrickmacross resembles Brussels lace. Carrickmacross lace originated in 1820, in the efforts made by Mrs. Grey Porter to teach her servant, Ann Steadman, to copy a piece of Italian lace. Miss Reid of Rahans, near Carrickmacross, taught herself and her sister the new art, and subsequently established a school in which poor children were taught lace-making as a means of supplementing the earnings the family obtained from working the little farm. The town of Carrickmacross is in the Bath and Shirley estates. When, in 1840, Tristram Kennedy became manager of the Bath estate, he was so much impressed by the benefit conferred on the neighborhood by Miss Reid's lace school that he raised a public fund, and built seven lace schools in and around Carrickmacross. He subsequently secured a grant of £100 from parliament to teach drawing and designing in his schools. Mr. Kennedy's schools, and the lace industry which sprang from them, were of the greatest help to the poor during the famine years. Many of

them were subsequently closed, but the central school at Carrickmacross is still in existence, and does good work, owing to the annual grant still paid by the government.

## LIMERICK.

Limerick lace is one of the best known of Irish laces. It is of two kinds—Tambour and run lace. In the former a hooked or crochet needle loops a fine linen floss or silk thread in a chain stitch through net stretched on a frame. It is truly embroidery, and the same stitch and method are adopted in oriental embroideries, especially in those made at Damascus. Where, however, the lace is fine and the design good, tambour lace is very effective and "lacey," and has the merit of being inexpensive, strong and of washing well. In run lace the design and filling are formed by darning in the net in threads of different thicknesses. An applique net, resembling Carrickmacross and called "Curragh," was also at one time made at Limerick.

The Limerick lace industry owed its origin to an Englishman, Mr. Chas. Walker, who, on marrying the daughter of a lace manufacturer, determined to try and make a commercial success of an industry which had at that time a most feeble existence. He brought over 24 girls from England as teachers, and in a short time a large amount of good lace was being made in Ireland. During the famine, lace making was one of the great resources of the district; and through an association of ladies, who worked hard to help the poor in their distress, a considerable sale was obtained for Limerick lace. This was the time when lace fichus, berthas, ruffles and frills were much worn by ladies, both young and old. The lace made at this period was very fine, good in design and delicate in execution.

## AFTER THE FAMINE.

After the famine, when death and emigration had greatly diminished the population of Ireland and the desperate need of an agricultural population to make some extra earnings, however small, had passed away, the Limerick lace industry declined. Public interest in it was lost, good designs were no longer furnished the workers, Limerick lace fell out of fashion, and till a few years ago only the coarsest kinds of the poorest design were made, and sold at very low prices. This pretty old lace was in this degraded condition when it was taken in hand, five or six years ago, by Mrs. Vere O'Brien, the adopted daughter of the late W. E. Forster, Chief Secretary for Ireland, who, on marrying an Irish gentleman and settling near Limerick, opened a school, at which to teach again the making of the charming old lace of the district. Under this kind and wise influence the industry has revived, and at Mrs. Vere O'Brien's school are now producing the most beautiful run and tambour laces, which are both fine in execution and artistic in design.

## YOUGHAL POINT.

Youghal point is essentially the Irish point lace. It has a distinctive character of its own, which makes it easily recognized. (Fig. 3.) The stitches, it will be noted, are very varied. Most Youghal lace fails, however, in point of design. The rose and the shamrock, particularly the latter, appear ad nauseum. In some Irish point, however, which has been recently made from designs furnished by the South Kensington museum lace committee, Italian motives prevail, and under this influence the lace has greatly improved.

Irish point owes its origin to the earnestness and ingenuity of a nun in the convent at Youghal who was anxious—as all good nuns of Ireland always have been and still are—to find industrial employment for the children of her schools. Chancing to come

across an old piece of Italian point, she unpicked it, studied the stitches of which it was composed, and reproduced them with success. She then determined to teach some of the poor children who were in need of bread to learn and make point lace as a means of livelihood. She succeeded so well that the first specimens of Irish point lace were sold at a high price. New point stitches were invented and designs were improved, and in a short time Irish point became owing to the devotion of this kindly nun to her poor children, an established success. It is now made in many convent schools; but that made at Kenmare, Kinsale and Youghal is the best. American ladies greatly admire this lace, and when passing through Ireland, on their way to Europe, they frequently give large orders for it at the convents.

Youghal point also fell into a low condition owing to the poor designs and coarse threads used, but of late years the lace committee at South Kensington and the School of Design at Cork have done excellent work in stimulating the production of good lace designs and in aiding the workers and teachers to obtain them, and Youghal point has again taken its position as one of the finest laces made.

## INNISHMACSAINT POINT LACE.

Away in that wild and desolate county, Donegal, in the midst of Lough Erne, there is a holy island called Innishmaccsaint, to which the poor peasants of the district often come on pilgrimage or to perform penance. Extremely poor the peasants of Donegal always are, but in 1816 their condition was desperate. An old piece of Italian point lace excited the attention of Mrs. Maclean, the wife of the rector of the parish of Tyrna, exactly as a similar relic had attracted the nun at the convent of Youghal. The old piece of lace awoke in each lady similar trains of thought, and induced each to make the same effort to help the starving children about her. This old piece of point was unpicked and the stitches of which it was composed discovered, and Mrs. Maclean began to teach the making of Rose point to the girls of her parish. Private orders sustained the school, and the earnings made were a great boon to the people. Innishmaccsaint point is heavy, and has not the delicacy and richness of the Venice and Spanish point. Lace of the same kind but of a higher quality is made at Miss Kean's school in Cappoquin, county Waterford.

A school at which reproductions of Greek and Italian reticella lace are made has been established by Mrs. Hall Dare, at Newtonbury. The lace produced is admirable, and nothing finer was made in Italy during the sixteenth century than the reticella turned out from Mrs. Hall Dare's school in Ireland.

## CROCHET.

Irish crochet is known all over the world. When the hooked needle—which was probably introduced from the east to produce tambour lace—was first used independently to make looped stitches in aria is not known. Crochet is probably an old art, and was known and practised on the continent, chiefly in convents, as long ago as in the sixteenth century. About the year 1836 it became fashionable in England owing chiefly to the pattern books published by Mme. del Riego, a lady who was always deeply interested in promoting the crochet industry in Ireland, and who, when she died, two or three years ago, left her fortune to be devoted to the encouragement of lace schools in the south of Ireland. It was, however, the great famine of 1846 which stimulated the crochet industry, when, owing to government grants, the energetic action of benevolent ladies, and the intelligent industry of convent schools, crochet lace

became the chief hope of the people in county Cork, and gave an immense amount of employment during a period of dire distress.

The nuns of the Ursuline convent at Blackrock county Cork, had already begun to teach their scholars to make crochet lace before the famine, and it is recorded that in 1845 their pupils had earned £90. When the unhappy country lay prostrated by the scourge, the crochet industry, springing from this industrial centre, became the main support of the people. The little hooked needle was turned, indeed, into a very wand of hope. Crochet was taught in almost every convent, and ladies exerted themselves to form classes, to introduce and invent new designs, and to keep up and improve the standard of the work.

## TO SAVE THE PEOPLE.

The names of two ladies are particularly associated with this effort to save a starving people by creating a new industry, namely, those of Mrs. Roberts of Thoruton, county Kildare, and Mrs. Hand, the wife of the vicar of Clones, county Monaghan. These ladies took as their models of design old Italian guipures and Venice points, and adapted them to crochet; and it is due to their intelligent direction that much of the Irish crochet is so rich and Venetian in appearance. Every girl taught was obliged to teach three more, and she could not get employment until she gave evidence that three girls had been taught by her to do good work. In this way the spirit of the Christian helpfulness spread, and thousands of girls were soon employed earning money to support their families and to save them from starvation.

The principal Irish crochet laces are the Cork and the Clones. The Cork is divided into the lifted and the knotted. The pattern is small and dainty, and the work fine and intricate. It is difficult to make in Clones crochet and sprigs, leaves and flowers are made independently, and are joined together by brides, which vary very much in fancy. In Clones crochet Venetian and Spanish points and Greek laces are reproduced with extraordinary skill. (Fig. 5.) Irish crochet laces, for which sympathy with suffering created so great a demand, fell, unfortunately, out of fashion, and a ruinous trade competition and the demand for cheapness so degenerated the once beautiful work and lowered wages that the industry almost died out. Mr. Biddle has of late years done much to revive it, and has supplied the Irish workers with beautiful designs. He has also introduced a splendid crochet lace in lustrous silk, both black and white. These new Irish laces, as well as the Limerick and Carrickmacross, excited the greatest admiration, even from the connoisseurs and lacemakers of Belgium and France at the great exhibition in Paris in 1889, and Donegal house, the depot for Irish industry, was awarded the silver medal, the only medal given for Irish laces. The Queen, in order to patronize Irish laces, recently wore a quantity of black silk Irish crochet guipure at one of the drawing rooms, since when this lace has been called royal.

## PLAILED LACES.

Before concluding, I must mention an effort now being made to introduce the pillow, and the making of torchon or plaited laces into Ireland. Mrs. Dawson of Headford, county Mayo, has been for many years engaged in this work, and has taught numbers of girls to make torchon lace. I have also in Gweedore, county Donegal, made an effort to establish pillow lace as one of the industries of the place, and have opened a lace school, where girls are taught torchon and Kells laces. In carrying out this work I was aided by the vote made me in parliament in 1887 for the purpose of village technical teaching in Donegal.