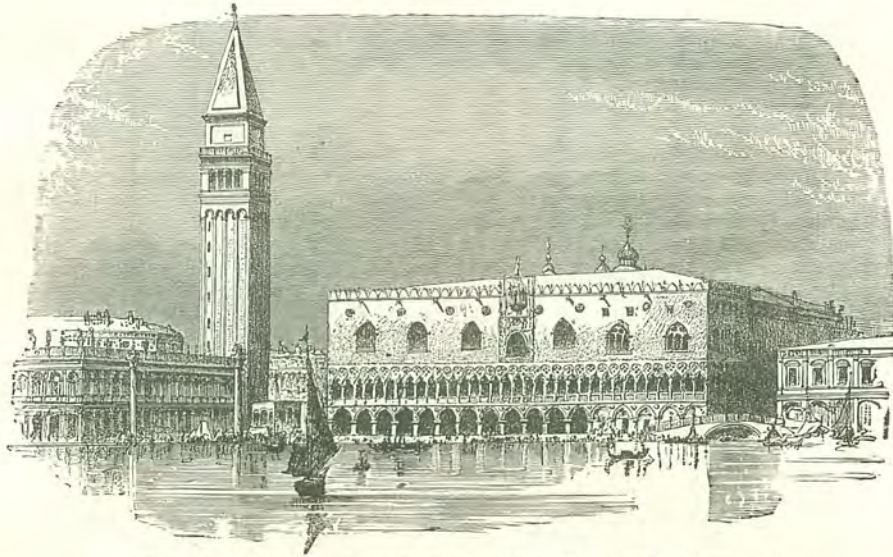




THE HORSES OF ST. MARK, VENICE.



THE DOGE'S PALACE, VENICE, WITH CAMPANILE NOW DESTROYED.

A HONEYMOON IN VENICE.



LAST May I was with my husband travelling in Northern Italy. If I must confess the truth, which I had vainly tried to conceal during our journey out, we left England on the same day on which, in the solemn service of the Church, we had been joined together as man and wife. We had been staying at

Como, in that lonely hotel which once was one of Napoleon's villas at Villa d'Este; then we went up Monte Generoso in the little mountain railway. It was really too early in the year for those high latitudes, and we had gazed through a snow-storm over the wonderful plains of Lombardy. We came down away from the early spring flowers, the fields of

narcissus, and here and there an early violet, back to the roses and wistaria, and all the summer flowers at Bellagio. We walked along the lake by moonlight, and watched the men and boys fishing with bright lights held at the bow of their boats, lights which attracted the fish, and then when they came near enough, a spear darted through the water, and the poor fish was landed dead at the bottom of the boat. It is a cruel way of catching fish. In the morning light you will see lots of dead fish washed up against the banks of the lake, so many are slightly speared, and get away to die a lingering death under the water. We walked about and watched the lovely fireflies, and listened to ghost stories about the Villa Saberlone, which was situated on the hill above us, and revelled in the fact of youth and happiness in the lovely land of Italy.

One day we determined that we could not return to England until we had re-visited Venice. In our bachelor days we had seen it before, but now we were married we felt that we must enter its enchanted isles together. We took a steamer back to Como, leaving the beautiful lake with the deepest regret; then train to Milan, spending a night there, and the next day at sunset we reached Venice. Never shall we forget the first sight of the fairy city, with its spires and domes rising like a beautiful pink opal from

the blue waters of the Adriatic Sea. Black, funereal-looking gondolas were waiting for us at the station; our luggage was placed in one, and stepping in we were silently borne along, with no sound save the cry of the gondoliers, to our hotel. The beauty and impressiveness of the whole scene is too wonderful for words, and in absolute silence we entered Venice together.

"Where Venice sate in state, throned on her hundred isles."

One day we had been wandering through the beautiful Duomo. The guides would not let us alone; we had refused six at least, and then a more intelligent-looking one than the rest absolutely persisted in showing us round. Tired of refusing, we at last consented. We were not sorry afterwards at having weakly given way. He refreshed our memories as to the date of the mosaics, taking from his pocket a piece which had fallen from one of them, a tiny piece of thick glass; he showed us how the colour was at the back of the glass, so that the whole mosaic could be washed without the paint ever being touched. Everyone seemed busy at St. Mark's. Tall extra candles were being erected; a baldachino, to be carried over the relics of a saint, was on its stand in the centre aisle, and round it were placed staffs mounted by gilded figures. It was the eve of one of Venice's greatest festivals—to-morrow would be Corpus Christi. We wished to walk round the galleries and so get a nearer view of those wonderful mosaics. Our guide started off to get the key, but he came back disappointed. Owing to the approaching festival, the galleries were closed earlier than usual. My husband looked at his watch; it was four o'clock. "Shall we go now and see the Carpaccios at San Georgio de' Schiavoni?" Before I can answer, our impetuous little guide begs to be allowed to take us to the great lace manufactory. "The signora must see it, the signora will have missed a great deal, she will be sorry after; the place is quite close." I see a slight shade pass over my husband's face, but these are my days of power, as I always laughingly tell him—our honeymoon is not yet over. I wanted to see this manufactory, I heard of it before I left England, and womanlike, too, I wanted my husband to buy me some of this beautiful Venetian lace! "Let us come; it will not take long, we can go on afterwards to San Georgio de' Schiavoni."

There are two ways of reaching Jesurums; you can walk from the Piazza across the Ponta della Canonica, or else, if you prefer it, you can reach it in a gondola. In Venice we always preferred going about in a gondola instead of walking. We found one waiting for us by the Doge's Palace; we jumped in, the gondolier turned in his wonderfully rapid way down the first side canal, and we glided up to the steps at the door of the manufactory.

We walked in, a gentleman met us, and at once, in perfect English, offered to show us over. He explained to us that four thousand women, varying in age from old women to quite little children, are employed in the manufactory, either in Venice itself, or in the Island of Burano; two hundred and fifty-six of these women are Italian convicts. The girls who are making the finest lace are only allowed to work at it for four hours, on the coarser lace they work for six hours, and they are paid seventy-five centimes a day.

The date at which the art of making lace first became known is a disputed point. Some think we find it mentioned in the Bible, and that Isaiah speaks of lace-making when he says (Isaiah xix. 9) ". . . they that work in fine flax, and they that weave net work." Many writers, on the other hand, think that the use of lace dates no further back than the sixteenth century. However, there is an ancient document in the Cathedral of Ferrara dated 1469 which fixes the price of the mending and ironing of lace, and another of about the same date mentions a division of goods between two sisters, and several pieces of lace are among the properties which are divided.

Lace is perhaps rather a development than an invention. Point lace is a form of embroidery; pillow lace, which is made with bobbins, is a sort of plaiting. Needle-made lace is probably the oldest form. If you remember, the king's daughters in the days of Solomon were adorned with a "raiment of needlework."

Where the primary idea of lace-making came from, we do not know; it may have come from the Greeks, or some say from the Saracens, but at any rate, in the fifteenth century the headquarters of lace-making were in Venice. Venice was the cradle of the art, Venice rescued lace-making from oblivion, Venice taught the art to the rest of Europe. Between the years 1600-1700 Venice reached the height of this industry, producing lace which was declared to be unique for delicacy and beauty. One of the beautiful Venetian lace patterns, called "mermaid lace," had a curious history connected with it. A young sailor, on his return from the South Seas, brought a coralline as a gift to his betrothed. She was very much struck with its beauty, and imitated it with her needle, thus starting a new pattern in lace.

The art of lace-making almost completely disappeared from Venice, but now it has been very successfully revived under the present Government. But to go back to the lace manufactory at Jesurums. The first room we went into was full of children, for the little Italians begin to learn at eight years of age. One wonders how these tiny things can be taught to keep the bobbins disentangled; some who are working with coloured threads have as many as twenty-five! Our guide tells us that the girls take about a year to learn their work; they are sitting on forms with their pillows in front of them. The scene is very much the same as in the work-room of any of our large London dress-makers, except for the darker faces, the brighter flashing eyes, and the more brilliantly coloured clothes which these little Italian girls are so fond of wearing. The room feels well ventilated, and the children look quite happy at their work. These lace schools, our guide tells us, are subsidised annually by the Italian Government, and they have been placed under the patronage of the Chamber of Commerce.

In the next room we were shown beautiful specimens of the lace which has been made. First some pieces copied from the old patterns are brought out for our inspection. Here are three varieties of Rosaline point; the first is in the Milanese style as made in Venice in 1700, the second is much finer, made about the same period, and the third has a profusion of raised work; the ground is a filigree of

marvellous fineness, and each rosette is ornamented with two, three, or even four piled rows of the most minute needlework—this is the Rosaline proper; it is far the finest and the most beautiful of the three, and was made in the sixteenth century. Next we are shown some Burano point; this is worked with the needle, and called after the island which was formerly celebrated for its manufacture. The next is a piece of mosaic lace; this is worked with bobbins; it is called mosaic because it is made in small pieces which are afterwards united like the stones or glass in a mosaic. We are shown beautiful handkerchiefs and fans—one lovely handkerchief made in Alençon point. There is very little difference between this and the Burano, except that the Alençon is made with round meshes, while the Burano is made with square meshes. We notice close to us a beautiful fan made in rose point.

Our guide tells us its history. An old fan was brought into the manufactory, so old that the lace was quite worn away, and nothing except the carved ivory "sticks" remained; these were thoroughly Venetian. If lace were to be made for it, something must be designed connected with the old Venetian Republic. A beautiful figure of the wife of a Doge is worked in the centre, the border is made of a mixed design, but all rose point and all worked with the needle. The idea and the execution are both very beautiful. Although most of the lace is worked from old patterns, yet we see from specimens like this that the art of making fresh designs has not been lost in the Venice of to-day. We asked the price of several pieces of lace, and we found it was extremely moderate; this, our guide told us, is due to three causes. 1. Female labour is cheap in Venice, owing to the fact that there are very few industries. 2. The lace schools being subsidised by Government, there is no expense connected with either the studying or teaching the art. 3. As the public buy straight from the manufactory, of course there are no "middle men." The lace is charged for according to the number of days it takes to make, allowing a franc a day; say a yard of lace took seven days, its cost would be seven francs a yard.

Our guide next showed us the museum of old lace. Here we saw many exquisite pieces of Venetian point made in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, some of it worked by the old nuns within their cloistered walls, some made by great Venetian ladies in their beautiful palaces. In the Middle Ages lace-making was a lady's daily occupation, either in their own homes or in the convent. Indeed, in the fourteenth century, lace was often known as "nun's work." The lace as we look at it is so wonderfully fine, like a piece of gossamer, or a spider's web, and yet it has lasted intact and beautiful through all these centuries; the nunneries are ruined, the palaces have gone, the nimble fingers who made it have long ago turned to dust and ashes, yet, strange to say, this little piece of fine lace remains! The Venice of to-day is beautiful! oh, so beautiful, with its ever-varying skies and sea; these must remain the same, the same campaniles, the same domes, the same fascination pervades it all. Venice still sits enthroned upon her thousand isles, as Byron saw her from his retreat at San Lazaro. Venice still can woo and win her hundreds of lovers; her magical power still exists, and yet what a different Venice she is to-day from the Venice she was, when that piece of lace came beautiful and fresh from the hands of its worker!

No Doge now walks grandly down the steps of the palace on his way to some great function at St. Mark's, no haughty noble moves along the crowded Piazza. The very gondolas wear a funereal garb instead of the gay colours they once were draped with. All, all is changed. Little girls and poor old women have learnt the art and can copy the lace which was once made by the highest ladies in the city. Venice—how changed you are, but lovely, wonderful, beautiful still! All this soliloquising over a piece of old lace! A "come along, dear" brings me back to the present. It is too late for San Georgio de' Schiavoni now, but my husband has been thoroughly interested; it will be better to give our fresher selves to those wonderful Carpaccios to-morrow morning.