



IRISH LACE.

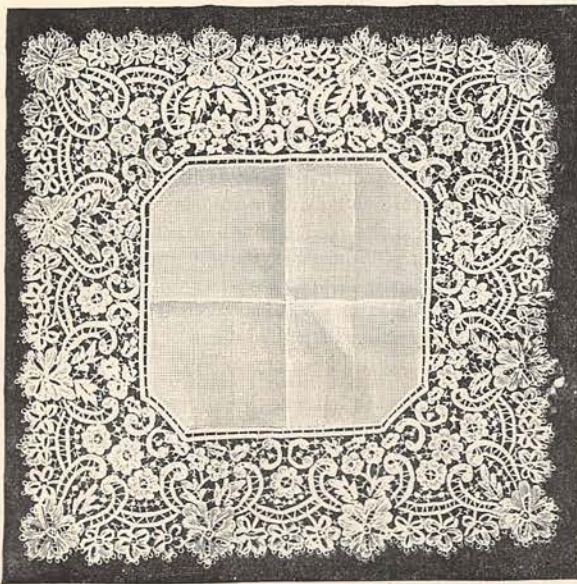


THE project of an Exhibition of Irish Lace at the Mansion House emanated from those true friends of the people of the Emerald Isle who would improve their condition from within by promoting their industries, rather than make futile attempts at doing it from without by fomenting their discontents, and to this end are invoking the aid of Fashion. That fickle goddess has decreed that lace should be the *cachet* of the present style of dress, and since real lace is rather more precious than rubies, has flooded the market with machine-made fabrics which, though far from costly, have a fictitious value in consequence of the large demand upon them for flounces, frills, furbelows, water-falls, and every sort of trimming that feminine ingenuity can devise. Thus the manufacture of woven Spanish, Bretonne, Duchesse, and other imitation laces has kept the looms of Nottingham busy, while those

who, both abroad and at home, made the fine old real laces with bobbins and needles have been driven to seek other occupations, and have in many instances lost irretrievably the most treasured secrets of their art. But the thirst for novelty is never quenched, and he who diverts popular taste into a new channel is usually on the high road to fortune. The promoters of the Exhibition of Irish Lace wisely judged that a *furor* could be created in that direction, and money honestly got and well earned may come into the pockets of the industrial population of that country in a manner that will go far towards making them prosperous and content.

It is perhaps not very well understood, even among ladies, what special varieties of this beautiful and delicate work are made in the Island of Saints. Her daughters have fingers as nimble as their wits, and taste that equals, if it does not surpass, that of their French and Belgian sisters. At Youghal, in County Cork, at the mouth of the Blackwater, the finest and most exquisite needle point is still made, and it would hardly be possible to find a specimen of ancient Venetian or Spanish point that could not be faithfully copied there. Even the secret of the far-famed "Point de Venise à Brides Picotées" is understood. The process is slow and requires such store of patience as the world gives Irishwomen little credit for, yet they bend themselves unweariedly to their task and produce marvels of dainty workmanship. The *lacet* point is a needle-made lace that lends itself very charmingly to trimmings, and some idea of its value may be formed from the fact that when two and a half inches wide it is worth 35s. a yard. The famous old rose point has a great deal of raised work in it, which has to be done with the utmost smoothness and regularity, and it is marvellous to see how close the threads lie to one another. A reel of cotton is not more evenly wound; yet there is all the difference between the regularity produced by machinery and the work of the human hand.

The lace known as Carrickmacross is indi-



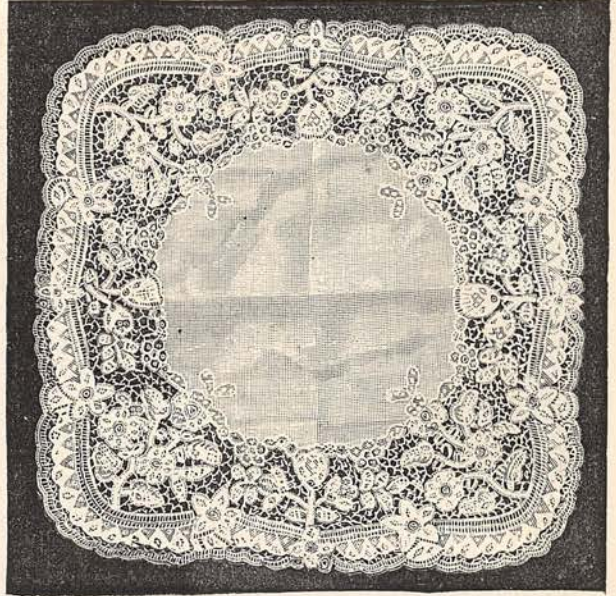
CARRICKMACROSS GUIPURE.

genous to the town of that name in County Monaghan, about 50 miles north of Dublin, and is also the production of the needle, though the groundwork of it is fine, yet firm, muslin. This is arranged in very striking patterns, each leaflet or geometrical form being outlined and connected with a distinct and somewhat coarse thread, called in some branches of the work a "trolley," which is embellished by being twisted into loops, and carefully sewn over with fine cotton to keep it in its place. It looks very beautiful over dark velvet, and its value is naturally in proportion to the delicacy of the pattern. Irish appliqué is made on the same principle, the muslin being laid on Brussels net, and it makes very elegant flouncing. An imitation of Carrickmacross is made in Switzerland by machinery, but though effective at a distance, it will not bear comparison with the genuine article, and it stands the test of washing very indifferently.

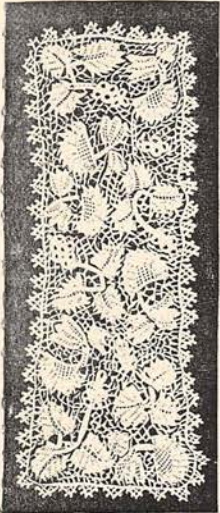
Needle point and Carrickmacross are, however, the laces of the few, and it is the patronage of the many that is wanted for paying purposes. The only Irish lace that comes within the reach of persons of moderate means is the crochet guipure that is made in Ulster, and there employs hundreds of hands. It is rapidly done, very substantial, and stands an astonishing amount of wear and tear. The old Venetian *Punto in Aria* may be admirably imitated in crochet, and some of the Vandyke patterns are extremely effective. Five-and-twenty or thirty years ago

there was a perfect rage for it among all classes in England, and in Paris it has regained a place in popular favour during the last year or two.

Limerick lace may be described as chain-stitch on net, and is very pretty, but perhaps the sewing machine



LACET POINT.



CROCHET GUIPURE.

has sounded its knell, for it is so easily imitated and made elsewhere, that it can no longer be considered peculiar to the city and county of its birth. But it is there produced in very light and graceful patterns and in various widths, especially for the garniture of wedding dresses, while bridal veils of it fall in a soft elegant manner peculiar to themselves. Limerick lace curtains are also deservedly popular, and perhaps it is in this form of household usefulness that most people are best acquainted with it.

These are the four great divisions of Irish lace, but for practical purposes the crochet guipure is the one most capable of development, and its encouragement the most likely to add to the national prosperity of the island that is uppermost in all our thoughts, and which occupies so important a part in the schemes of our legislators.

We are indebted to Mr. C. Harry Biddle, the honorary secretary to the committee promoting the Exhibition of Irish Lace at the Mansion House, for information on this subject, as well as for the specimens from which we have taken our illustrations.

E. CLARKE.



CARRICKMACROSS APPLIQUÉ.