

## Modern Lace.

BY ANNA BALLARD.

In proportion to the comparative number of the population and the amount of the dry-goods trade, more needle-wrought and pillow-made lace appears to be sold with us than in the better countries of Europe, if we take New York, London, Paris, and other large cities for exponents. In this estimate the purchases of royalty and nobility are left out, being in both quality and quantity fitly intended for heirlooms, and which are often ordered direct from the lace-maker, and thus do not pass along the several steps of mercantile transference.

No people in the world more admire elegance than we; none more appreciate high harmonious refinement. Perhaps in innate love and craving for more than we can afford, and self-denial of the solid necessities on account of our fondness for the tasteful, we as a people, or rather, we the better half of the nation, take the front rank. It enters into the domestic experience and exploits of my next neighbor to have sold off a set of strong homely chairs for the purpose of replacing them with prettier ones, which successively broke down in the most sudden and mortifying manner, always on conspicuous occasions. The history and demise in disgust of each of these pretty chairs would be a chapter of accidents worth laughing over.

Many a woman among us wears a linen collar, even of old-fashioned cut, who would not surround her own lovely throat with machine-made lace; while in the countries in which you can buy laces within a few hours of the villages where they were wrought—in Paris, which is the ideal center of finery, and in London, which is the mart of the whole world—there seems not to exist the repugnance to the personal use of machine laces that many of us have; that is, as soon as we know enough about lace to know the difference between the work of the human hand and the rapid work of machines.

"I never have worn an inch of it, and I wouldn't," said one of our tasteful and fastidious women to me the other day, when chatting about how she managed to have home luxury with her young boy on a moderate income.

The women across the Atlantic, both poor and rich, know lace better than we do; a knowledge that distinguishes at a glance the genuine, knows whether it was needle-wrought or made by the hands shuffling bobbins over a lap-cushion; whether it is English, Belgian, Irish, Venetian, Maltese, or old; for age is excellence in the love-liest department of woman's wardrobe. Generally the only opportunities we have had of educating ourselves in regard to lace, not as workers, but as connoisseurs, have been the attractive windows of our mercantile houses, and the few specimens which we or our more affluent friends have had the pleasure to possess.

"Duchesse," a lace all foliage and flowers, all design and no ground, is made in quantities in Belgium; not much in Brussels, as we might infer from the familiar term Brussels laces. That pleasant city is the mart where it may have been bought by American merchants, unless, which is more probable, they bought it after it had been exported from Brussels to Paris or London. The large cities of lace districts are not where the most of it is wrought. Living is too costly in a metropolis for the support of a laborer who maintains herself by so slow an industry; yet a lace-worker, and a very fine one too, can be found in Brussels by hunting; also a lace-school for children, not far from the mediæval cathedral of

St. Gudule, an edifice which is in itself a volume of fascination, which nourishes the reverent heart, feeds the intellect with history, and furnishes the imagination with a dream. There live also in those cities lady amateurs, who now and then wear lace of their own hand-work, or as we well may say, their handiwork. Of one such little rose, given me by a convent sister, and the work of a lady in Brussels, the parts of the florette can only be discerned with a microscope.

All "Duchesse" is made on a pillow with bobbins. There are varieties of it which are strongly marked on the other side of the Atlantic, viz., the beautiful, firmly made, and the poor, ragged-looking. One is as "real" as the other. Little, comparatively, of the ragged quality is hung in the windows of our merchants; they know too well the taste of the women they will sell to, and that "best or nothing" is our motto. It is with lace as with other products, the best of everything comes to the United States. We have the best the world makes, and pay the highest the world pays. The lace tariff does not protect a home industry, nor is it likely to; lace-making is a work too slow for the present type of our population and for the influences toward haste and a quickly reached end in our every pursuit. At the present time, in old Europe even, it is difficult to keep girls at lace-making. They leave it to make shoes, with far more liberty, less labor, and larger pay. They even prefer domestic service.

A woman from Colorado had just preceded me at Honiton. She bought a large quantity of the long celebrated specialty of that quiet Devonshire district, and "she only bought the finest work," said the lace woman whom I chatted with. There are other varieties—the heavy, rich, costly Duchesse, and the light, exquisite—both being well made, rich and fine.

Little Belgium, gem of a country in old-fashioned quietness, a contented peasantry, still in the state of jolly, hearty happiness, which has not been disturbed by an unrestful ambition for something above wooden shoes and huts; Belgium, whose ladies are both gracious and very graceful, who direct you the street you should take, and more than answer your questions with the unaffected courtesy of true gentlewomen; whose nuns make you feel that they are "sisters" in character as well as in name; Belgium, whose many cathedrals are each a lesson which needs a month to be learned well—Belgium is a country eminently devoted to lace-making.

The "Flemish laces," long celebrated, have their birth in the lowest part of the land, near the sea. Flemish laces are peculiar in quality, not in species, and are sustaining their veteran reputation for thorough, exquisite work. Bruges is a center, and Ghent, with their famous belfries and their everything interesting and detaining to a thoughtful, studious tourist. Different districts have each some sort of lace, to the making of which they are mainly devoted—Bruges to "Duchesse;" Ghent, or Gand, as it is there called, to "Valenciennes;" Alost to "Application;" the Convent of Ayghem to "Needlepoint;" the Convent of Burst (pronounced Boorst) to black laces; and the region around Grammont to black laces, so finely and so largely made that the fine-black pillow lace is known as "dentelle de Grammont." In nearly all these localities other kinds are also wrought. Valenciennes is made extensively throughout the lace regions, at least more than in Valenciennes itself, which is not far off. So the lace called "Chantilly" is, at the present day, in France, made anywhere rather than in the village of Chantilly, which is given over to shoemakers and horse-racing.

Grammont is not far south-west of Brussels; all these Belgian localities lie so neighboring that railroad trips to them seem like an omnibus ride,

or a carriage drive. The convents of Burst and Ayghem are near the town where chiming bells were invented, and where still they ring, as they are rung nowhere else, so long, so complete, a sufficient Sunday service in themselves; these Alost chimes are wonderful.

These two convents are situated on opposite sides of the railroad station, for there is no village of Burst, at distances which invite and necessitate to rustic walks. But in such circumstances an American is perfectly willing for a ramble of a quarter of a mile on one hand and a long mile on the other, through the peculiar agricultural scenery of Belgium, the flax-raising, etc.

The young girls of the little village of Ayghem sit outside the door of summer days, on low stools, making the flowers and foliage of the "Duchesse" which are so pretty.

Two sisters of Brussels are the patronesses of these convents, and that of Ayghem was founded as well as sustained by Mmes. Julie Everaert et Sœur.

Torchon, extremely fine, fully fit for the dainty wardrobe of the first baby, was made in the convent of Burst, when their beautiful black lace had no sale. Our Belgian friends count very much on the American market. Nearly every sort of lace which commerce brings us can be found in Belgium, in the process of creation, and growth, under patient hands; its beautiful capital being the collective center and commercial metropolis of the industry of the kingdom, so that in fact "Brussels lace" is of many kinds.

Of all the fine laces "Valenciennes" seems to be the strongest; its mesh has an extra twist, and its tiny dots are little webs of cloth.

Valenciennes is not conspicuous or self-assertive, and it harmonizes with every other kind of lace, an advantage in a country where lace is so dear and fortunes are so fickle. It has, of all its lovely rivals, the most persistent hold upon the taste, always fine in effect, always suitable for the occasion at home or abroad, like a black silk gown. It is a lady-like lace, not frivolous nor frail, although delicate. A neck surrounded with fresh "Valenciennes" is always charming and satisfactory, at least the surroundings are; and probably the greater number of women who are sympathetic with laces, if they could possess but one kind would choose "Valenciennes."

Lace-makers are peculiarly beyond the pale of rivalry in their business, because to do good work, and to do it fast enough to earn a living by it, they must have learned it in childhood and practiced it through life. They are like musicians. The attainment of fine skill is both native and the result of great application. The nuns of Burst told me that there are many girls who never can become lace-makers. After trial they have to be given up.

Of the laces in the American market with which the eye is familiar, or which soften the toilets of the more luxurious of American dames, even a glance at all the over-the-sea localities from which they come, with a little chat while we look, would take longer than to read a single page or two in our favorite literary and fashion magazine.

## A Mohair-mixture Dress.

THE process of manufacturing the mohair-mixture goods, in such great demand during the summer months for ladies' dresses, is unique, and may even be classified among the fine arts, so much taste and skill are requisite for the excellent production of these textile fabrics.

The primary methods of operation, utilized by the manufacturers, have a long pedigree, as the arts of spinning and weaving are the progeny of