

the infirmity of St. Paul is mentioned, point to one and the same conclusion, that the infirmity was a partial loss of eyesight, attended with stabbing pain, rendering him an object of pity to those who had pity in their hearts, and of reproach to those who had none.

St. Paul concludes the Epistle to the Galatians by calling their attention to the large characters of his own writing. His almost constant employment of an amanuensis is of itself a suggestion, if not a proof, that some infirmity hindered him in writing freely; the infirmity was not in his hands. Surely from this passage, without others, we might conclude that he had an infirmity in the eyes, even if it cannot be positively proved that this was the "thorn in the flesh."

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#### ART. VII.—THE HONITON LACE INDUSTRY.

A CRY for help reaches us from the south-east corner of Devonshire, where for the last three centuries the female population of the districts round Honiton has supported itself by the making of lace. Less than half a century ago these workers, scattered throughout the small towns and villages, numbered some eight thousand, earning an ample wage and skilled in their work. But times have changed; the trade has, of late, been steadily on the decline. The workers have dwindled to some fifteen hundred; the women in general are less capable of achieving first-rate work, and what they do succeed in producing is, from the force of circumstances, very poorly remunerated.

The distress is great; the hopes of the workers have sunk to the lowest ebb. They press in on all sides upon the small grocers, who are the ordinary lace-traders in the villages, offering lace in exchange for the necessaries of life, thankful if by these means they can earn a bare subsistence. But in too many cases not only can these small grocers not afford to pay the workers in cash, but even the "truck" or barter system, as it is called, is unworkable. The grocer has no market for the lace thus thrust upon him, he cannot afford either to buy or exchange, and the workers are left to starve. There are whole villages dependent on the industry, and lace centres where lace-making is the staple industry of the scattered hamlets, whose inhabitants are thus entirely devoid of the means of earning the scantiest livelihood. Even where the distress is less acute there is still great hardship. The work may be sold, but the worker receives a low price. And, in

the case of those thus thrown out of work, it must be remembered that they have no other trade to fall back upon. In one case, at Axminster, they have been fortunate in finding employment in the brush manufactory; but that is an isolated case. Hidden away in the valleys, or in the lonely cottages on the hillsides, the scattered population cannot concentrate sufficiently to undertake regular work. Lace-making is essentially a home-industry. As such it is, or has been, the great stand-by of the women.

A great effort, involving the expenditure of much time and trouble, independently of the financial side of the matter, is being made by some of the gentry in the country districts where the lace is produced, to improve the industry. They are soliciting help from outside, without which the attempt to revive the decaying trade must fall to the ground.

Before, however, entering into the details of the help needed, it may be well to give a short account of the industry. Many people do not even know where Honiton is. Personally, I must confess that for some years I laboured under the impression that Honiton was a small town in the south of France. It is, in fact, a small town at the extreme north of the lace-making district, which occupies the south-eastern corner of Devonshire, adjoining Dorsetshire, extending for some twenty miles along the coast, as the crow flies, and some thirteen or fourteen miles inland. Here the Flemings, driven from their own country by the cruelty of the Duke of Alva in the sixteenth century, formed a settlement. They brought with them the art of lace-making, learnt originally from the Venetians. As the serge, or say fabric, declined, the manufacture of Honiton lace took its place in the district. Lace-making extended at that time over a far larger portion of England than it does now. Refugees, settling in many different counties, brought with them their own art. Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire, Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Somersetshire, Dorsetshire, Devonshire, with Ripon in the north, the principality of Wales, and some of the islands, all formed centres for the hard-working settlers' lace trade. Of these, the Buckinghamshire and Honiton laces are, speaking broadly, the only survivals. They are certainly the only ones which can now pretend to any degree of beauty, or boast of a sale, however poor.

Bone lace, or bobbin lace, so called from the bone pins or bone bobbins used in its manufacture, underwent many fluctuations in Honiton as in other parts of England. Early in the sixteenth century it was in a flourishing condition, as is noticed by Westcote in his "View of Devon." It was also exported to France.

But before the middle of the century Flanders and Italian lace had become the rage among the ladies of England. In vain Charles I. and Charles II. prohibited the import of foreign laces for their subjects while wearing them upon their own persons. The stringent Act passed in 1698, involving a penalty of twenty shillings per yard on imported lace, and confiscation of the lace, proved even less successful. Flanders retaliated by prohibiting the importation of English wool, and so great was the distress caused by the edict that from the year 1700 Flanders lace was excluded from the prohibited imports. Men and women alike vied with each other in the costliness of their lace. Smuggling procured them this article of necessity, since it could be obtained by no fair means. In coffins, in loaves of bread, in turbans and umbrellas, by high and low, the illicit trade was carried on. The highest dignitaries appear to have connived at it, Embassy attachés, the wife of the Lord Chief Justice, the Sheriff of Westminster, all play the chief parts in notorious smuggling cases.

So greatly was the English lace trade affected that the sovereigns deemed fresh protection necessary. At Frederick Prince of Wales's marriage, in 1736, all the Court were ordered to appear in English lace. Again, in 1756, on the marriage of the Princess Augusta, the same order was issued and contravened by the gentry. The Custom-house officials descended in force upon the Court milliner three days before the wedding and seized the whole of the forbidden goods, to the dismay of the ladies who had ordered them.

In 1717 a society, which styled itself the "Anti-Gallicans," was formed for the promotion of English trade in lace, and the discouragement of foreign imports. It was for a time successful in accomplishing its objects. Among others who profited by the incentives offered to lace-workers was one Mrs. Lydia Maynard, of Honiton, who in 1753 gained a prize of fifteen guineas for some ladies' lappets "of unprecedented beauty." But, notwithstanding further enactments in its behalf, the lace industry grew less and less. Two great fires at Honiton in 1756 and 1767 caused great distress; and from the end of the eighteenth century the industry in Devonshire has steadily declined, with but a few flickering periods of brighter promise. Queen Charlotte, Queen Adelaide, and our own royal family did their best to give a fresh impetus to the dying trade; but their example has been but feebly followed, and the consequence is the present widespread distress and depression.

Honiton lace proper is purely a pillow-lace—that is to say, it is wholly guiltless of work with the needle, such as is used in point-laces. The process of working is as follows: A

pattern is traced and pricked off on a piece of brown mill-board of smooth surface, the holes serving for the insertion of pins, which are stuck firmly into the cushion below the mill-board. This cushion is technically termed a "pillow"—hence the name pillow-lace. It is a board, either round or oval, suited for holding on the worker's knee, and stuffed with a cushion. The thread is wound upon small bobbins, each thread requiring a separate bobbin. The thread is twisted round the pins with extraordinary dexterity, the bobbins being thrown so quickly, with both hands at once, that it is impossible for an inexperienced eye to detect any method in the working. The old Honiton lace consisted of sprigs made separately, and worked with great care into a ground of net, made with bobbins in the same manner. This net is called the "real" Honiton ground. It was worked with the finest thread obtainable at Antwerp, which was a very costly one. Seventy pounds per pound was the price paid for this thread at the end of the last century. The net when made was proportionately dear. The usual mode of payment was to lay it on a flat surface and cover it with shillings, the worker being entitled to as many shillings as could be crowded into the piece of net. A piece of the "real" net was tested by Mrs. Bury Palliser, the great authority on lace, some years ago. It measured twelve inches by thirty: its value proved to be £20—the exact sum which the owner had paid for it. The workmanship of this "real" ground was beautifully even and regular.

In 1809 a great blow fell upon the Honiton lace industry. Heathcoat's invention of a machine which could produce net grounding at a price far below the market-value of the old ground, suddenly paralyzed the workers. The old ground disappeared, nor has it recovered its ascendancy. Since 1872 a few small pieces of it have been made, but with much difficulty, and so far they are not altogether satisfactory samples. The sprigs after this failure were either sewn together with a needle, or *appliquéd* upon machine-made net—a very clumsy plan. So universal was this practice, that the specimens sent for exhibition in 1851 were entirely of *appliqué* work.

The lace having thus hopelessly degenerated, the workers lost heart. The sprigs degenerated in their turn into unnatural conventionalities or distorted monstrosities, intended to represent nature. New patterns could not be obtained to work from; the old lace schools were swept bodily away by the Education Acts and Factory Acts, and thus the children could no longer be taught the industry. Finally the prices went down, and the workers, who could formerly make some fifteen shillings a week, were reduced to four or five shillings.

Originally the children were apprenticed in lace schools taught by dames, at the age of from eight to ten years. For the first year they earned nothing, but learned their business; in the second year they received payment at the rate of sixpence per week; and later, were paid according to the number of the hideous "turkey-tails" or "bullock-heads" they could make in a day—a girl of ten earning perhaps eightpence, and older girls a shilling in the day. No doubt these old lace schools had their abuses as well as their use, and their abolition has been in the main for good; but, as a result of it, the girls are no longer well taught, and there are, therefore, fewer good workers. In addition to all these difficulties, the thread used in the work is usually of too coarse a quality. The quality is reckoned by the number of skeins or "skips" which go to the quarter-ounce, a great deal of the lace being made of from 6-8 skip, and a still larger amount from 12-14 skip thread, whereas, for a fine lace, 22 or 24 skip thread is required.

The earliest result of the efforts made by the gentry in the neighbourhood of Honiton has been a thorough investigation into the condition of the lace industry by Mr. Alan Cole, sent down for the purpose by the Science and Art Department of the Kensington Museum. His report has been adopted by Parliament.

This report emphasizes the following needs of the lace trade and lace-workers—needs which an earnest desire to help on the part of the public, and especially in some respects of the ladies of England, may go far to relieve. These needs may be shortly summarized: Technical schools for lace-making; a new set of designs, and the extinction of the present recognised conventionalities; better and finer work; a return to the "real" Honiton ground; and a good market for the improved lace. To attain any of these objects outside help is imperative.

The children on leaving the Board Schools at present have their trade to learn. It is late already to begin. No doubt, if lace-making could be to some extent taught in the schools in preference to some of the useless subjects now forced upon the children, it would make a foundation. But even if this is impossible, there is nothing to prevent, there is everything to promote, the opening of technical schools for the instruction of the children immediately on leaving school. No expensive teacher is required. One of the largest lace-dealers in Devonshire gives it as her opinion that for twelve shillings a week one competent in every respect might be obtained.

As to the designs, they are a most indispensable factor in the improvement of the industry. It is impossible to see any

considerable collection of Honiton lace, such as that sent up to the Glasgow Exhibition, without being struck with the poverty of invention, the depravity of taste, and the constant and wearisome repetition of designs. There are some valiant attempts to forsake the beaten track of mediocrity, and they are on the whole successful. But Somerset House, the School of Art, or some other school of design, should be set to work to revolutionize the present patterns. They should be carefully adapted to the needs of the workers, and to the nature and character of the work. Our schools of design are still young in comparison with those of France, Germany, and Italy.

The improvement in the texture of the work, the return to the "real" ground, and the better market, are purely questions of there being a demand for a better class of article from the ladies of England, and of their encouraging the English rather than the foreign productions. If those who are able to indulge in the luxury of lace would turn their attention to the helping forward the simple folk of Devonshire in their struggle for existence, much might be done. The wedding lace of brides, the Court flounces not infrequently needed, could well be supplied from Honiton instead of from abroad. What is required is a general stir among the public—a putting forward of the question; and last, but not least, a moderate amount of funds. In order to found technical schools, to get the new designs, to teach the younger workers, to offer prizes for excellence in execution of artistic designs, a certain amount of money is imperative.

Why should our Honiton lace follow the old Venetian point, now, alas! extinct? Why should it not rather, like the lace of Alençon, which fell low and yet revived, or like the Punto di Burano, which was recovered on the verge of extinction through the teaching of its last worker, raise itself from its degraded condition into the position not only of a thriving industry, but of an influence in the world of art? If English-women will come forward to help, it may yet be easily and splendidly saved; if not, its fate is sealed, and before the first half of the twentieth century has expired, Honiton lace will be a thing of the past.

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