

THE LACE INDUSTRY.

The Belgian Ministry of Industry and Labor has, for some time past, been issuing a series of Reports upon home work in that country. The fourth of these, prepared by Dr. Pierre Verhaegen, deals with lace-making, and is particularly interesting. It is copiously and beautifully illustrated, contains much curious detail, and gives a picture of industrial conditions not only interesting in themselves but full of instruction and of warning.

As to the antiquity of lace—a subject upon which the paucity of positive evidence leaves room for the widest diversity of opinion—Dr. Verhaegen prudently confines himself to observing that no documents dating from before the fifteenth century are known which conclusively prove the existence of lace. In England the word appears for the first time in the Coronation expenses of Richard III. in 1483. Within a century from that date, lace had become a customary part of the dress of royal and noble persons. Henry III. of France, if tradition may be believed, was so anxious about the perfection of his lace ruffs that he himself, upon occasion, “got them up” with crimping irons.

By the close of the fifteenth century lace-making was practised, probably to a considerable extent, in the Netherlands, and the Emperor Charles V. ordered it to be taught in schools and convents. His son, Philip II., however, took a different view, and, on account of the difficulty of getting domestic servants, forbade the “making or causing to be made of any works with bobbins,” except by little girls under twelve. Happily the decree seems to have been ineffectual, and the industry remained, on the whole, a prosperous one until the French Revolution dis-

turbed, among many greater things, the market for laces. With the Napoleonic period lace began to revive, but received a great blow in 1819, when machine-made net was invented. By-and-by, however, the lace trade allied itself with this new enemy, and machine-net was employed as a groundwork for some laces of which the grounds had previously been laboriously woven with the needle or with bobbins. The rate of manufacture of such laces was, of course, greatly quickened, and the price correspondingly reduced, while, machine-net having been brought to great perfection, the beauty and durability of the lace is but little diminished. In 1837 the Jacquard loom rendered possible the imitation of Valenciennes and some other kinds, and the trade in real lace suffered enormously.

About 1840 a wave of extreme poverty passed over East and West Flanders. Then, as a means of help, charitable people began to think of reviving the lace industry; many convents established lace schools in which the best traditions were maintained, and Belgium was brought by degrees to its present position as the first lace-making country of the world.

Lace-making has always been divided into two branches: needle-lace and bobbin-lace, and both kinds are largely manufactured in Belgium.

In the manufacture of needle-lace, the first step is the preparation of a pattern representing some small separate portion of the whole design. The outline is marked in white dots on a blue paper, and the worker begins by tacking this paper upon a backing of linen or calico. Next, taking together four or five threads, and treating them as a single thread, she tacks this down

with fine stitches all along the outline. This process concluded, she proceeds to the real making of the lace. Since only a tiny portion can be done at a time, and since the most delicate cleanness is demanded, the pattern is generally protected at this stage by a bit of *toile cirée*, having only a small hole through which the part in hand is left exposed. Stitches of extraordinary fineness now fill in the outlines; the solidity of the thicker parts (called *mat*) varies, and the delicate openwork (the *jours*) is generally put in by a special worker (a *foncuse*). The *mat* being all finished, a coarser thread is very finely and closely button-holed over the outlines, the original tackings that held the first tracing of thread to the pattern are cut, and the piece is ready to receive its *jours*, and then to be either "applied" or joined to other pieces.

Among needle-laces Brussels point, or *point de gaze*, is perhaps the most widely known, and is one of the most expensive. Its special characteristic is a fine net ground, made by the needle. Its beauty depends partly upon the regularity of this net, partly upon the delicacy of the *jours*, and very much upon the goodness of the design. Some modern Brussels point is as good as the very best old work; but much of it is poor in design and in execution, the net coarse and ill-joined to the flowers, the flowers irregular, and the outlining thread carelessly oversewn. Brussels point is, roughly speaking, no longer made in Brussels, but is almost invariably produced in various country districts, especially in East Flanders, by home workers or by workers in convent schools. Only in the tourist season are lace-makers put to work by way of advertisement in temporary workrooms belonging generally to retail shops and open to the inspection of visitors.

Brussels application consists of simi-

lar flowers "applied" upon net, and the net now used is always machine-made; the applied pieces themselves being either needle-made or bobbin-made. This lace has been greatly improved of late years, and some of the designs reproduced in this Report are equally beautiful and original. The process of sewing the pieces upon the net is called *stricage*, and is performed, upon a large frame of the whole width of the net, by a worker called a *striqueuse*.

Venice point and rose point, those most beautiful and costly of heavier laces, are also made in Belgium, and are there brought to a higher degree of perfection than in any part of their original country. In *point de Burano*, however, a finer lace made, like Venice point and rose point, of linen thread, but having a net ground very much like that of Brussels, the Belgian manufacture remains inferior to that of the school of Burano.

The maker of bobbin-lace, unlike the needle-worker, needs a certain outfit. A cushion or pillow, well stuffed and generally mounted on a stand, is the first requisite. Within or behind the cushion is a drawer to contain the completed portion of the lace. The bobbins are little wooden implements of which the upper part forms an elongated reel, the lower part a handle. Those generally used are made of deal or of oak and cost from 16 to 24 centimes a dozen. In boxwood they cost 2.40 fr. a dozen, and in rosewood 3 fr., but bobbins of this sort are employed only by the many ladies who, in Belgium, make lace for their own pleasure. The number of bobbins required for different laces varies, according to the width and the complexity of the pattern, from four to 1200 and even more. The central principle, in all cases, is the use of pins around which the threads are passed, and by which they are held in place until they have been firmly woven together in the

required design. A pattern on green parchment or blue paper, pricked at the point where each pin is to be inserted, is provided, and if the lace is complicated, or if the worker is making it for the first time, a piece of lace is given her as a model.

Bobbin-laces are of two kinds: (1) Those which are made in comparatively small separate pieces, afterwards sewn together (as in the coarser Bruges laces); applied on net (as Brussels application); or connected by a needle-worked ground (as *point d'Angleterre*). (2) Those which have a ground of net woven at the same time as the figures of the pattern and with the same threads (for example, Valenciennes, Chantilly and Mechlin laces). These are generally edgings, insertions or flouncings, are made by the same worker throughout, and have the same threads running through their whole length.

Laces of the first class require comparatively few bobbins—generally 12 to 14; those of the second, if wide and complicated, require so large a number that long pins are employed to divide the bobbins into groups, and keep them out of the workers' way, so many only being left free at a time as are needed for some particular part of the work. The pins again are differently used; in laces of the first kind, they mark the outlines, and the outlines only, are pressed well home, and remain in place until the piece is finished; in such laces the movements of the threads between are few and simple. In the net-ground laces, on the other hand, pins have to be placed at many interior points, from which they are removed to be set further on as the lace advances; and the movements of the threads between these lightly planted pins are excessively varied and complicated.

Bobbin-laces are naturally more exposed than needle-laces to imitation.

and the demand for imitations has seriously injured the manufacture of Valenciennes and Chantilly. The French imitation Chantilly, indeed, comes very near, both in appearance and durability, to the real lace. Torchon, too, a lace of a poor sort, at best, can be made by machinery practically as well as by hand. That it should continue to be made by hand is therefore neither desirable nor profitable. Yet no bobbin-lace is more widely manufactured—or worse paid.

The demand for real Valenciennes has greatly diminished since about 1860, and though it is still largely made, the workers are so ill paid that many have given up the work. In these days Valenciennes is chiefly employed for trimming underlinen, French ladies, in particular, preferring a little edging of real to a more elaborate decoration of imitation lace. This use naturally leads to the manufacture rather of narrow than of wide laces, and the handsome wide Valenciennes would perhaps hardly be made at all were it not for the existence of a special market among the peasant women of Normandy and of Arles, who use such lace for their caps. Fashion, however, is slowly but surely superseding this charming form of headgear, and the younger lace-makers seldom or never learn the wider and better designs, but content themselves with producing narrow insertions and edgings, poor both in pattern and in workmanship.

The old *point de Flandre* or *trolle-kant*, and its delicate variety, *dentelle de Binche*, have almost fallen out of use, the *trolle-kant* living on in a coarser kind used for furnishing purposes, and Binche lace having been superseded in its native place by Brussels application and by shoemaking and clothing industries.

Mechlin lace, that most costly, most delicate and most characteristic of

bobbin-laces, seems to be on the eve of extinction. It has not, for many years past, been very fashionable; the apprenticeship required is long, and the dealers sadly lacking in enterprise. School after school has ceased to teach it.

In Malines itself, where 150 years ago every woman made lace, only 15 old women remain, and these are engaged upon narrow ill-made laces, for which they receive but a few centimes. At Turnhout, about 800 women still make Mechlin lace, but fine pieces are seldom produced and only three workers are left who are capable of making out new patterns. The appendix of the Report tells us that a school has just been founded for the teaching of this lace at Malines, its original home. Perhaps there may still be time to save this beautiful manufacture from disappearing entirely, but a few years hence it will be too late.

Point de Lille is at its best, so similar to Mechlin that it is sold as such in France. The essential difference lies in the net ground, which in Mechlin is produced without the help of pins, by the mere play of the bobbins, and in Lille, as in most other laces, by the twisting of the threads round pins; and the two can be distinguished by the fact that, in Mechlin, the meshes run parallel with the selvedge and, in Lille, the other way. Lille lace, though not so seriously threatened as Mechlin, will lose its best customers when the Dutch peasant women give up wearing their pretty national caps. Some of the designs in wide lace for this purpose are remarkably good.

Chantilly, originally a French lace, was first made about 1740 in the town from which it takes its name; but the Revolution, regarding it as an aristocratic product, condemned merchants and makers alike to the guillotine, and although the manufacture was resumed when the storm had passed, the trade

was by-and-by removed to Caen and Bayeux in France, and to Grammont in Belgium, and in these new homes attained to greater perfection than before. About 1870, however, a change of fashion caused this lace to fall out of demand, and although of late years the fashion for Chantilly has revived a little the trade has never really recovered, and the singular excellence of the imitations now made in France seems to render unlikely any very great development of real Chantilly in the future.

Point de Paris, with its peculiar net ground, easy to recognize but not very easy to describe, is still made in considerable quantities, though seldom of very good quality. M. Antoine Carlier, however, has caused some excellent designs to be worked for him in this lace, both in white cotton and in black silk.

Point d'Angleterre and bobbin-made Brussels application, laces which differ only in their grounds, still command a certain sale and the latter, like the needle-made application, has been enormously improved of late years. Some admirable designs made in the convent of Lierdekerke appear in the Report, poorer specimens, however, are much manufactured, and machine-made pieces are often put into cheap laces sold as "real Brussels lace."

Point d'Angleterre, in spite of its name, would seem never to have been really an English lace. The English Government in 1662 prohibited the importation of foreign laces, but the manufacturers of this country, not succeeding in producing a substitute of sufficiently good quality, took to smuggling in Belgian laces under the name of English point. The extent of this smuggling may be guessed from the cargo of a vessel taken by the French on its way to England, and containing nearly 745 ells of lace, besides collars, kerchiefs, aprons, fans, petticoats

and gloves trimmed with *point d'Angleterre*.

The name of *guipure* is applied to two very different sorts of lace, one much akin to torchon (the laces known as Cluny and Maltese, for example) and the other made in separate pieces and resembling a coarse Brussels application. This second class includes *guipure de Flandre*, Milan point, Bruges lace and Duchess lace. The English language has never recognized the imaginary distinction between guipures and other laces, and generally accepts "guipure" in what was probably its oldest meaning, *i.e.*, a trimming of braid made into a pattern before being sewn on. A *guipure de Flandre* used to be made both with the needle and with bobbins. The former has died out entirely, but the latter was recovered in 1848 by Mlle. Marie van Outryve d'Ydewalle, who having obtained permission to copy the old lace upon an alb, tried and tried until she succeeded in reproducing it. She taught a clever worker who, in turn, taught the nuns of Ruddervoorde. Mlle. d'Ydewalle superintended the new undertaking, prepared designs and pricked out patterns. The lace was brought before the public at the great exhibition in London in 1851, became fashionable, and is now largely made in Eastern Flanders. This is the lace which, under the names of Flemish lace, Flanders lace or *point de Flandre*, has been of late, and indeed is still, so excessively fashionable in this country. It is comparatively cheap, very effective, easily made, and not trying to the eyesight of the workers. Unfortunately, manufacturers are apt to insert machine-made pieces; sometimes all the thicker portions will be made of machine-made lacet. Renaissance and Luxeuil laces (so largely sold in England at the present moment) are entirely made of such lacet, with or without intervening patterns in needle work, and Dr. Verhae-

gen does not admit their right to rank as laces at all. These, indeed, would seem to be guipures in the English sense of the word.

Duchess lace was originally a delicate variety of *guipure de Flandre*, and has gradually been brought to high perfection; a coarser kind, known as *duchess de Bruges* is largely made and in great demand. Bruges lace, properly so called, is distinguished from "Bruges duchess" by an almost entire absence of straps, the ornaments in Bruges lace touching each other at various points and being sewn together. This lace, again, which is by no means expensive, has been enormously sold of late in England.

Besides what may be called pure-bred laces, there exist mixed laces; duchess, for instance, often has needle-made openwork; and a bobbin-made edging often borders a needle-made Brussels application. New varieties, too, which cannot be exactly ranged under any existing heading are made from time to time. Some manufacturers introduce gold and silver threads into duchess laces, and others, going further still, have made laces in colored silks. The frontispiece of the Report shows a fan made in threads of gold, of red, white and two shades of green silk. At Courselle-sur-Mer in the north of France the manufacture of colored laces has been seriously undertaken and M. Fernand Engerand, writing in the *Musée social*, describes these laces with enthusiasm, points out the difficulty of imitating them by machinery and hopes great things from their development. Dr. Verhaegen takes a less sanguine view. The fashion for such fancy laces, he says, is almost certain to be ephemeral, the women who have taken up their manufacture find a difficulty in returning to the more stable kinds and the passing mode for the fancy lace results in a diminution of the manufacture of lace altogether.

Embroidered net, which is of course a very different product from lace, though English purchasers seldom observe the distinction, has of late years become an important article of commerce and occupies many hands in Belgium. There are three main kinds, made respectively with the needle, the crochet-hook and the machine.

Needle-embroidered net is made only in small pieces, is but little manufactured, and is employed for hardly anything except the caps of Dutch peasant-women.

Crochet embroidery is done upon a frame, the design being first traced in color upon the net; the thread is held along the lines of the pattern with the left hand and worked into the net by means of the hook held in the right. This embroidery is easily learned, quickly executed and not fatiguing to the eyes. Its appearance is good, it lasts well and is not expensive. A large proportion of what English buyers and sellers call "lace ties" are made of it and are decidedly preferable both in appearance and durability to machine imitations of lace. Embroidery with spangles, or as fashion chooses in these days to call them, sequins, has, for some years now, employed a good many hands who were formerly engaged in bead embroidery. The threading of the little shining disks is chiefly done by boys. In this country sequin-patterned dresses are already falling in the scale of fashion and the demand has probably already begun to decline.

Embroidery with a machine looks very much like crochet embroidery and is sometimes sold as such, but is far inferior in durability, and does not, to quote Dr. Verhaegen, "survive three washings." It pours from the machine with incredible rapidity and is correspondingly cheap.

By far the greater number of women engaged in the manufacture of these

various kinds of lace work in their own homes. Some unmarried women and a great many learners follow their trade in the workrooms of convents and a certain proportion of specialized workers—*patronneuses* (who weave the first piece of lace from a new design and prepare a pattern from which other women can work), *piqueuses* (who prick out the patterns), *striqueuses* (who apply laces upon net), *monteuses* (who put together laces not applied, and *foncuses* (who put in the *jours* or open-work parts of needle-lace) work upon the premises of the lace-merchant. Embroidery on net, indeed, is often carried on in workrooms, and these are said to be very unhealthy, partly because they are overcrowded, and partly because they are heated by charcoal foot-warmers and by a bad kind of closed stove.

A kind of workroom to be found in large towns during the tourist season is a part rather of advertisement than of manufacture. To these workrooms, which are generally adjuncts of a retail shop, the tourist is attracted by various devices; "touts" hang about their doors, and a notice in the shop window offers free admission. Within the workrooms to which he is introduced by a voluble saleswoman, he beholds four or five women in wide-winged Flemish caps, working at as many different kinds of lace. Astonishing information is poured into his ignorant ears as to the cost of material and the great length of time employed and he is led back to the shop, there to purchase at an exorbitant price a piece of lace which is apt to be very ordinary and of which he fondly believes that he has seen the maker at work. In the "off-season" these workrooms cease to exist and the women return to their homes.

At home, the lace-maker sits under her one window, either alone or with a similarly employed daughter or sis-

ter. In the evening, she works by lamplight, a round bottle filled with water being placed before the lamp in order to throw the light upon the work. Sometimes a few drops of sulphuric acid are added, to give a blue tone to the water and render the light less dazzling to the eyes. If two or three neighbors assemble to work together of an evening, each brings her water-bottle, and they sit in a circle round the lamp. The lace-maker is generally clean and seldom ragged, her sedentary occupation not wearing out her clothes. The occupation is not considered by doctors to be unhealthy, provided that the hours worked are not too long, particularly during the years of early youth, and that some exercise is taken. Where the dwelling-place is healthy and the light good, the sight does not appear to suffer very much. The usual working day is about twelve hours, but many women work thirteen or fourteen, pausing merely to snatch a hasty meal. They freshen themselves by two stimulants, snuff, and the "traditional cup of coffee taken at the close of daylight, and pretty frequently accompanied by a quarter of an hour's rest." While in some towns the housing is fairly good, in others it is terrible. At St. Trond, for example, the lace-makers inhabit a separate quarter called by the significant name of *Enfer*, and containing all the horrors of the worst city slums. At Bruges some of the old streets are full of lace-makers and in warm weather the click of bobbins sounds continually from open doors and windows. Many lace-makers, too, inhabit the *Godshuizen*. These almshouses for old people date back to the close of the seventeenth century, were founded by rich citizens of Bruges, and consist of separate dwellings with a common court. Some of them belonged to corporations or to guilds. Some admit old couples: some, old men; and some, old women,

and many of the inhabitants continue to follow light trades. In former times lace-makers in Belgium—and very probably elsewhere—used to sing together at their work. The Duke in "Twelfth Night" says of a song that:

the free maids that weave their
thread with bones
Do use to chant it.

The bones were sheep's feet used as bobbins.

In a few places the custom of singing still lingers and old songs dating back to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are still to be heard. Their lines and stanzas have been lengthened or shortened, often with little regard to the sense, in order to make them mark the different processes of the work. A pin is placed with the word "one," and by the time the first verse is ended, the work is ready for this pin, or another, to be planted in the next place at the word "two." The songs pass from generation to generation and are supposed never to have been written down. One of them, in twenty-two verses, is given as a specimen in this Report, together with its air and a French translation. It begins with a pleonasm of a singularly English kind:

There once was a child, and a little
child,
A child of seven years,

and goes on to tell a grisly tale of how this little child, entered the king's rabbit-warren, shot the finest of the king's rabbits with his little bow and arrow, and was imprisoned by "the lords of the town" in an iron tower, where he was fettered hand and foot. The father offers to "Messire du gentil chateau" the lives of "my seven young brothers" in exchange.

Thy seven young brothers I desire not
The first three are but monks,
And the four others are fine young
men

Who bear the arms of the king
Yes, the arms of the king.

Seven young sisters having been refused on similar grounds gold "red and fine" is proffered. The gold is accepted, but the child is not given up in return; he is taken out to be hanged from the highest tree in the warren. His ascension of the ladder, his successive addresses to his father, his mother, his brother, his sister, and the Virgin, and his final decapitation are told in the most harrowing detail. The next verse—the 19th—is a warning to "Messire" to keep his door close shut; the 20th, 21st and 22nd narrate how Messire was found next morning with his head cleft in twain, how two "duivels" came to carry away his soul, and two "engels" that of the murdered child. The very theme of this feudal tragedy seems to mark its antiquity and one can but hope that M. Bleyau, who obtained it from an old woman of Ypres, will endeavor to preserve more of these songs before they completely die out.

Few lace-makers are in direct communication with wholesale houses. With the exception of those who work in convents, they almost always supply their handiwork to, and receive their payment from, an agent, who either himself takes orders and designs from one or more wholesale houses, or buys a stock on his own account, and sells to merchants, shops, or retail customers. This middleman (or more often, middlewoman) distributes the work, the women coming to him, tells them what they will be paid, and supplies them with thread, for which he will deduct from their wages a price generally considerably higher than that which he has paid. Payment is by the piece; but advances are frequently given. The work being finished, is brought in to the agent, who, if he is satisfied, pays for it. If he considers

it ill made, if it is greyish or yellowish in color he will refuse it, or more probably take it at a reduced price, well knowing that he can dispose of it. Some agents fine the worker for delay, after having deliberately set her too short a time; but generally no time is fixed for delivery, the need of the women spurring them on to work as quickly as they possibly can. Some agents are shopkeepers and practically compel the workers to take payment in kind. Of course the usual abuses of the truck system arise and the women are charged at exorbitant rates for inferior goods. In one particularly oppressive case the workers complained anonymously to the "procureur du roi" at Termonde; the agents were prosecuted and convicted; but the law continues to be broken in spirit if not in the letter; the women receive their money, but dare not spend it elsewhere than in the shops of the agents. One agent actually pays a convent in credit notes upon his own grocery shop.

Those agents who work for several wholesale houses will sometimes sell to one house the designs of a rival, which they obtain by entering for a time into the service of the latter, or by getting into touch with its agents, who, too often, lend themselves willingly to this sort of fraud.

Some agents, again, do not stay at home, but make regular rounds, receiving and giving out work at an inn; and yet others, who approximate to the status of pedlars, and who deal generally in the poorer sorts of bobbin-lace, go round to the houses of the women, cut off the work done, pay for it, and go their way. Sometimes an agent of this class finds his harvest snatched away by a competing dealer who bids a trifle higher; and the whole village of Harlebeke was once thrown into agitation by the appearance of an agent who offered sixty-two instead of sixty centimes for an ell of Valenciennes.

The influence of the agents upon the trade and upon the condition of the workers is almost entirely detrimental; and cannot better be summed up than in the words of the Report: "We believe that in the lace trade as at present organized, the agent is an indispensable part of the machinery. The apathy of the manufacturers, the lack of initiative among the workers and the requirements of the manufacture combine to render him a necessity. And yet his elimination, or at the very least, the weakening of his part in the business ought to be the aim towards which all persons should direct their efforts who have at heart the interests of the industry. The agent injures the manufacturer by taking his designs and his customers. He oppresses the worker in every possible way and pays her a starvation wage, in consequence of which the working hands in the trade tend to diminish, while he and his kind increase and multiply. Finally he injures the standard of manufacture by promoting the manufacture of common articles, and doing almost nothing to encourage the technical skill of those who work for him."

The expression "a starvation wage" is but too justly applied. Of the 386 workers whose cases are enumerated, with some degree of detail, in the second volume of the Report only ninety receive as much as one franc a day; and, of these ninety, one alone earns three francs. Among the others, twenty-five are paid 1 franc; thirty-two, from 1.0 to 1.50; twenty-five, from 1.0 to 2.0; and only seven 2 francs. The agents, on the other hand, almost always become rich.

There is perhaps no other industry in which so great a proportion of the total value is imparted by labor. The plant is inexpensive, the raw material disproportionately cheap, the cost of storage and transit singularly small, and the finished product not liable to

deterioration. The whole value of real lace lies in the design and in the workmanship, and this latter demands in the higher branches great skill and long training. In all equity, therefore, the worker should receive a large share of the profits that do undoubtedly accrue. The retail price is not low, and the demand, though limited, seems, for the best kinds of lace, to be steady and permanent. Here, even more conspicuously than in most cases, the problem is evidently one of organization and distribution; and the part played by the convents, by one or two enlightened manufacturers and various ladies would seem to point out the lines of reform.

The first and great virtue of the convents is that they give good training under good conditions. The rooms are large and airy, and the nuns are careful to avoid long hours for very young workers, though parents too often rebel against this care, and threaten to remove their daughters unless they are allowed to earn more money. The convents nearly always aim at maintaining a high standard of work; some of the finest illustrations in the Report are of convent-made lace. That figured over-leaf for instance, comes from the convent of Liedekerke. As a trader, the convent fulfils the same function as the agent, but with differences. The convent is, in the first place, permanent, and, in the second, not rapacious. The primary aim of the nuns is the employment of the women; that of the agent the enrichment of himself. Thus the convents generally give rather better pay than the agents, though in some cases—Liedekerke for one—the convent pay is a little lower than that of local middlemen. The reason is that the convent workers make very fine application, which is not so quickly sold, while the others make common, easily disposed of articles in Brussels duchess. The Superior of the convent, how-

ever, refuses to set her workers making the poorer lace, and is probably right, for their vogue will pass away, and the women who have grown accustomed to inferior work will not be able to take up better sorts. Meanwhile, the merchants pay a preposterously low price to the convent for its beautiful productions, and the convent is unable to insist on better terms. It seems as though it should be possible for the various convents to combine and employ an able manager to transact their sales. The Superiors of convents can hardly in the nature of things be conversant with commercial conditions, or able to meet a sharp man of business on equal terms.

While most merchants are sadly supine, and do not attempt to improve either designs or styles, a few do seriously aim at maintaining and bettering the trade. Some, anxious to bring into Belgium the profits now received by French designers, have trained youths and girls with excellent results. Dr. Verhaegen mentions a young peasant girl in the employ of Mlle. Minne-Dansaert who had been studying for four years and whom he saw making an excellent design for a fan.

Many ladies have done much, in different countries, to preserve and improve lace-making. It was a lady who recovered the lost *guipure de Flandre*; a lady who is opening the new school at Malines; ladies who established and fostered the excellent school and work-room at Burano, where some of the finest lace produced in modern times is executed. In our own country Queen Victoria founded a lace-school at Honiton; and a society of ladies, with the Princess of Wales at their head, undertakes that each member shall give an order to the school every year. The Irish Industries Association, established in 1886 and now presided over by Lady Cadogan, performs, among other functions, the part of an agent

for the sale of Irish laces and, in the year 1900, sales to the value of £28,000 were effected by the London branch alone.

At present the conditions of the lace trade in Belgium, as shown by this admirable Report, are far indeed from being satisfactory. The women who do the work are horribly ill paid and are consequently abandoning lace-work and going into factories. Many of the more intelligent among them give up working and become agents and in that character amass profits for themselves, without serving the interests of the trade. The number of agents, who are more or less parasitic, increases; the number of producers diminishes, and the condition of those who remain grows progressively worse. The manufacturers grumble, but do not combine to suppress the evils from which they suffer. If the trade is to be preserved at all, some steps must be taken to ameliorate the pay of the workers and to direct their labors into the most profitable channels—that is to say, to the best and finest laces. Poor lace must inevitably sooner or later be driven out of the field by mechanical imitations, but the best lace will always possess qualities not to be approached by machine work.

Dr. Verhaegen would recommend the establishment of a society composed of influential persons on the model of those ladies' societies which have worked so well in other countries. A highly skilled paid manager should be employed to superintend technical details; a school founded in which the making of every sort of lace manufactured in Belgium should be taught, including those kinds which, like Chantilly, Mechlin and Valenciennes, seem to be on the point of extinction. Of such kinds the manufacture should not be at present encouraged, but the art should not be suffered to perish, since fashion, which has deserted them, may

return to them and make them once more a source of profit. Local schools would be formed which would teach, each the special lace of its own district, and would be watched over by a local committee; and the teachers in all the schools would be drawn from the ranks of the most successful pupils. Every process connected with her own kind of lace would be taught to every learner, and a school of design would form part of the establishment. The ladies of the society, like those of the English and Irish societies, would undertake to be customers; and sale-rooms would be opened, at first in Brussels and afterwards in other

towns. Finally the society would supply lace to merchants and take orders from them. Since so many intermediaries between the worker and the customer—at present there are sometimes as many as four or even five—would be eliminated, the workers could be better paid without any increase of selling price. Lace-makers would no longer be tempted to seek other callings, and learners would press for admission into the society's schools; the parasitic agent would by-and-by cease to exist; and the lace trade of Belgium would be saved from that danger of total decay which at present undoubtedly threatens it.

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Clementine Black.