



THE LACE SCHOOL AT SAN VITO

A WOMAN'S WORK FOR WOMEN IN ITALY

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ILLUSTRATED FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

THE grass stands high in the meadows. Poppies and daisies bloom there by the billion. Vines hang from tree to tree and the vineyards slope to the sea. White and smooth stretches the hard road; wild roses and morning-glories clamber over the low walls on either side; poplars and plantains shade us.

In front is a great plain—the most populous agricultural district in Italy. The district is rich not only in soil, but in air, and in this sun-steeped air it is doubly blessed, for the nearness of both mountain and sea are apparent in the invigorating breezes that blow over these fields. Nowhere are there more evidences of fecundity than in this land, bearing many crops of many kinds.

To the north and east the plain is bounded by the Carnic and Julian Alps. About seven miles from either range is the hill on which we stand. From our vantage-point we can well appreciate the fact that these ranges—rocky, steep, snow-capped—form the natural northern and eastern boundary of Italy.

Of course the mountains look as they did when Trajan and Attila traversed them. Nor can the plain have changed much, even though the Roman Utina became the Friulian capital Udine and then a favored Venetian stronghold; even though proud old Byzantine Aquileia down there on the coast was snuffed out by Attila nearly fifteen centuries ago; even though pagan temple architecture has been supplanted by that of Christian churches with their bell-towers of perfect proportions, detached from the main structure, as is the custom throughout Venetia.

Church and tower crown many of these long hills, which plunge, promontory-like, into the plain. One such church with its campanile rises just behind us as we stand on this hill of Santa

Margherita, eight hundred feet above the Adriatic. The oldest part of the church dates from the very early Christian centuries and formed the first feudal-ecclesiastical stronghold to the north established by the Patriarchs of Aquileia.

Yet, despite feudalism, the Friuli must always have been a fairly independent folk, as becomes those who reside in this sheltered, favored corner of the earth, and as becomes those who for centuries were under republican rule. We are prone to think of the Venetian Republic as confined mostly to the Island City, the residence of its Doge. Yet the people who lived throughout the Veneto, within a radius of a hundred miles of its capital, were inspired and are still largely inspired by republican sentiments; indeed, they have something of the Swiss about them. Politically and socially they are republicans and democrats rather than monarchists and aristocrats. They are apt not to start with the title of any one about whom they may be talking, but with the personal pronoun. For instance: "He is a good man and a real Venetian—the Pope." "That gentleman—Count di M.—said so and so." With them title seems an incident. The man's the thing.

This tall tower of Santa Margherita behind us marks not only the noteworthy Past, but also the noteworthier Present. It marks the location of two institutions, interesting as evidences of social and educational uplift.

The first is a lace school. One enters a long, low building. A hundred small chairs line the walls of the large, cool, brick-paved room where we stand. Little girls from seven years upwards are the pupils. At this time of the year many are needed in the fields, but they can often manage to come for an hour or an hour and a half a day. Once a poor little maiden only four years old wanted

to come, too, but the rules were against taking any one so young. Nothing daunted, she begged some pins and bobbins and persuaded the lace pupils to give two or three yards of their thread to her. And so she began. The littlest laborers are of course set to work by the teachers at simplest designs, and it is a pretty sight to see the tiny tots at their

establish others in the Friuli, and she has done so in half a dozen other villages. Other women in other parts of Italy have now established similar endeavors, until at present thousands of girls are under this capital industrial influence.

But the lace school has been doubly useful. It has taught the peasants throughout Italy that the coin of the



THE RUINED CASTLE OF BRAZZÀ

tasks out-of-doors rather than indoors. The teachers receive from \$4 to \$8 a month. The best lace pupils make from \$40 to \$60 a year, not an inconsiderable sum in this land of low-cost living towards the support of the girl's parents or towards her own dowry.

The lace school is thus a distinct economic gain to the peasants, and has naturally become popular both with parents and children. They urged its founder, Countess Cora di Brazzà, to

realm is not the only money. Time is also money. When a storm comes, the farm hands go to shelter and do nothing. The girls have been working in the fields as busily as the men. The latter are apt to be lazy, but the former take up their lace labor at home. They make about two cents an hour, more in proportion than they would be getting if working in the fields at seventeen cents a day—and a very long day at that.

Thirdly, the lace school has taught

cleanliness to every family and village represented. The school's first pupils were disgustingly filthy in their persons and habits; now, the rule of the whiteapron and the white sleeve, together with industrial training, has made them at fifteen to eighteen clean as well as capable, and not a little insistent upon the same qualities in the members of their families and in their suitors.

Finally, the lace school is a school of morals. Prize-day is the great day of the year. Here in the Friuli, for forty miles around, the children gather in the park at Brazzà, not far away from us. The spirit underlying the whole endeavor is shown in the fact that certain moral qualities are rewarded before mere proficiency in lace-making is noticed. Thus, the first prize—a golden three-leafed clover on a gold chain—is given for the three virtues of self-control, order, and truthfulness.



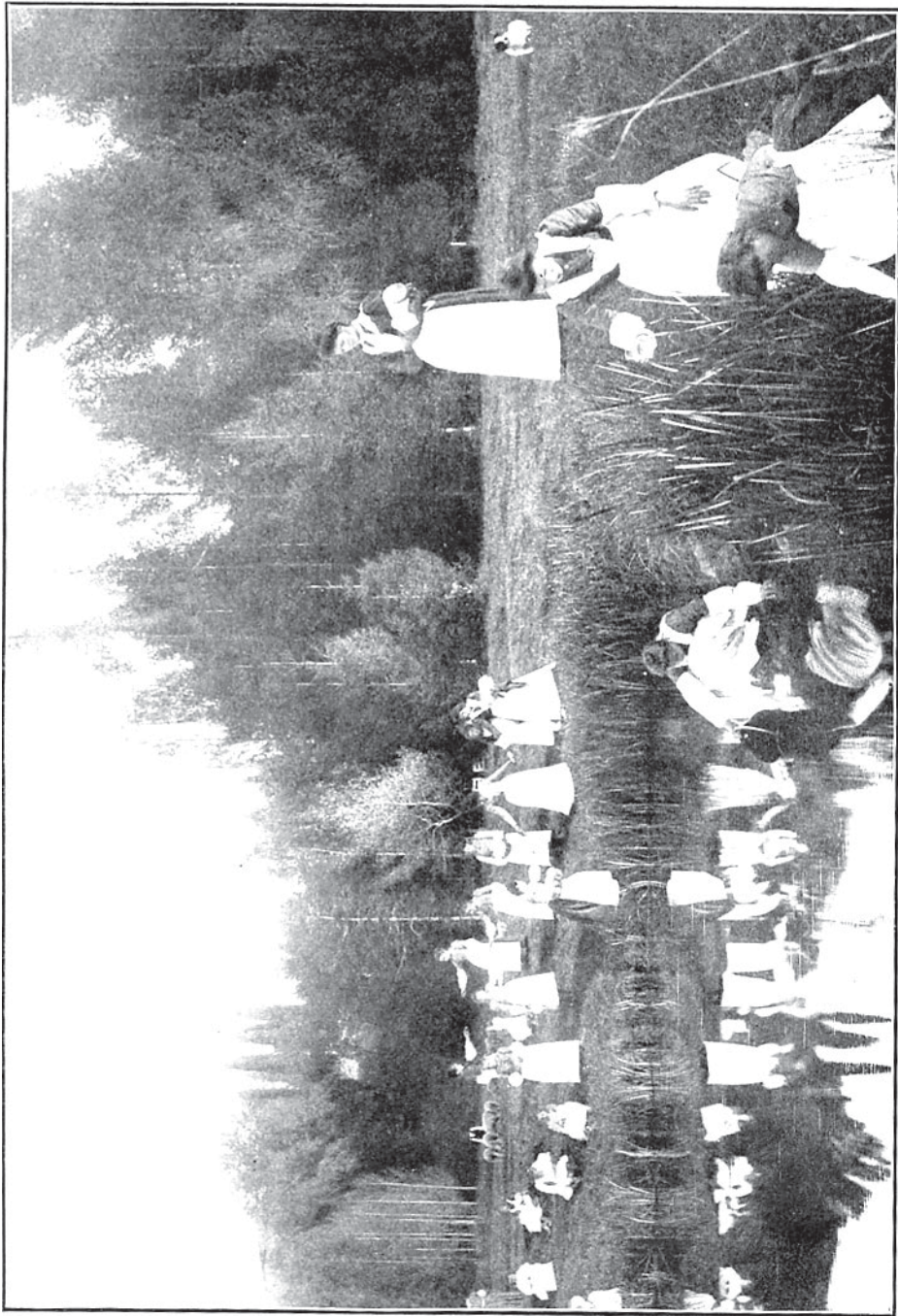
THE LAST TOUCHES AND THE FIRST STITCHES

The second prize rewards the co-operative spirit, and goes to the girl who has taught the most to her companions. Every step in these schools is co-operative. When a little girl has learned one or two stitches, she must teach the second stitch to her companions before she herself learns the third. Now that morale has been emphasized, the last prize, a fully equipped cushion, is given to the girl who has done the best work.

The sale of laces shows that middlemen managed to make large profits between the price paid to the girls for their product and that paid by the merchant for it. To do away with this, thus benefiting both producer and consumer, the founder of the lace schools started a society under the name "Le Industrie Femminili Italiane," a national co-operative association for women's arts and crafts, a central clearing-house. In the few years



VIEW OVER THE PLAIN FROM SANTA MARGHERITA

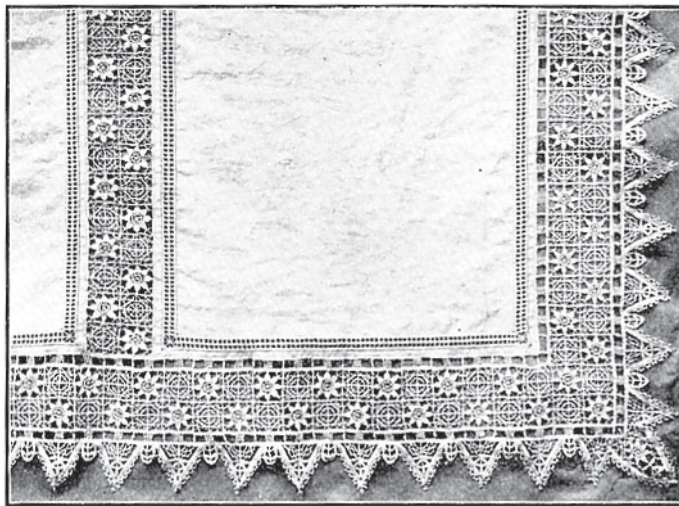


PLAY-TIME IN THE PARK AT BRAZZA

of its existence this society has had a notable success: After paying four per cent. on its stock as well as allowing a discount to stockholders on their purchases, the association ameliorates the condition of its contributors by distributing among them its profits in proportion to the work sold. It does more than merely to open markets to women's work; it has given a marked artistic development to their production, and it has also revived ancient handicrafts which had almost become extinct. For not only may any woman send her lace to the association's shop in the Via Marco Minghetti at Rome for sale, but any artist

crafts represented in *Le Industrie Femminili Italiane* open some other employment to peasant women besides that of the field or the factory.

The creator of these admirable social engineering has this year established a third. It is international and educational in character. It has taken the form of a summer school. Women from any country, bearing acceptable references, may there find a home and opportunities for study while enjoying good food and lodging at reasonable rates, a peculiarly healthful climate, beautiful surroundings, and agreeable companionship. Instruction at low charges is given



SOME OF THE SCHOOL'S WORK

Detail of tablecloth in hand-woven linen and an imitation of Genoese fifteenth-century lace made by the "lace children" for Queen Margherita

or craftswoman or group of women in other departments may send in their work. The society's domain now includes laces, embroideries, knitting, linens, and textiles; work in leather, wood, lava, coral, tortoise shell, ivory and mosaic, paintings, engravings and designs on glass, paper, stuffs, porcelain, enamel, etc.

Among the society's most active patrons are the King, Queen, and Queen-mother. They care about this work because, as they have said, it is a home conservator. Whereas women, going to work in field or factory, have been apt to leave their children at home to run wild, lace-making and the other arts and

in the languages, music, painting, archaeology, folk-lore, and agriculture. The school remains open until November 11. The post-office address of this Santa Margherita Summer School is at Torreano di Martignaccio.

The ultimate aim of this endeavor is not that of a commercial undertaking, where, in exchange for so many dollars, so many ounces of solid information about this, that, or the other thing are to be given. The aim is to bring together women from various countries, breaking down barriers of prejudice between nation and nation, giving them a broader international and individual outlook.