

YOUGHAL.—Of all the varieties of Irish lace, that known as Youghal lace is justly regarded as the most beautiful.

It is at the same time the most difficult to make, being worked stitch by stitch without any foundation. The Youghal lace industry had its birth in 1847, the Irish famine year. Mother Margaret Smyth, a nun in the Presentation Convent, co. Cork, horror-stricken at the sight of the starving women and children around her, conceived the idea of starting some employment which might provide them with bread. But of what that employment should consist sorely perplexed Mother Smyth. It so happened that one day, searching in out-of-the-way nooks and corners, she chanced to light upon a scrap of rare old Italian lace. The moment of inspiration had come. Here was work which might yield bread for poor hungry girls and children. That lovely scrap should be made to give up the secret of its construction. Setting to work, she picked the lace to pieces, unravelling it thread by thread, until at last she fully grasped all the details of the delicate and intricate pattern. Mother Smyth's difficulties were, however, by no means at an end. Her self-imposed task was an arduous one; but at last, after many attempts and repeated disappointments, she succeeded in establishing a school for lace which is now of European reputation.

Of the original scrap of old Italian point which served as Mother Smyth's model, nothing now remains, as in her eagerness to master its in-

tricacies she unravelled it to the last stitch. As time went on and the workers acquired skill, they invented new stitches, and made so many changes in the original pattern that at the present day Youghal needle-point lace may justly claim to be regarded as a purely Irish production. Hundreds of new stitches have been invented, and the threads are so complicated as to render it almost impossible to unravel. No words could do justice to the beauty of these almost fairylike productions of the needle, some of which rival the spider's web in the fineness and intricacy of their meshes.

Youghal lace, from the countless number and complicated nature of the stitches, is far more lasting than most other laces, and will bear any amount of wear and tear. After undergoing for years the process of washing and making up, it will be found as good as ever. The greater part of the lace is made by the girls in the convent, under the supervision of the nuns themselves. Some, however, is made by the women, married and single, of the surrounding neighbourhood. So profitable has the industry proved to these, that many not only support themselves, but also clothe their children on their earnings, while some depend upon it as their sole means of living. Thus the Youghal lace industry has been the means of dispelling the grim shadows of want and hunger from many a poor home, and enabling numbers to enjoy some of the comforts of life. E. L.