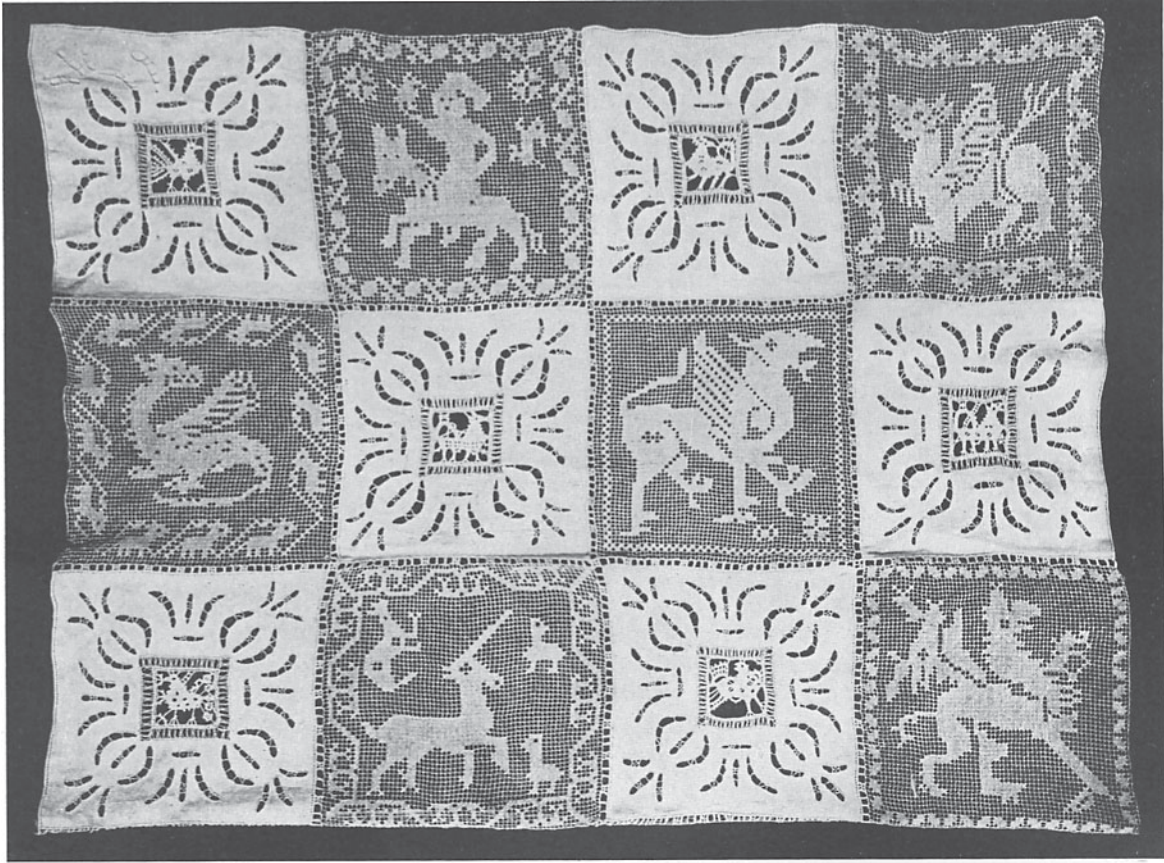


## *An Italian Lace School*



PUNTO TRAFORA WITH DARNED FILET SQUARES

### **A**N ITALIAN LACE SCHOOL IN NEW YORK BY EVA LOVETT

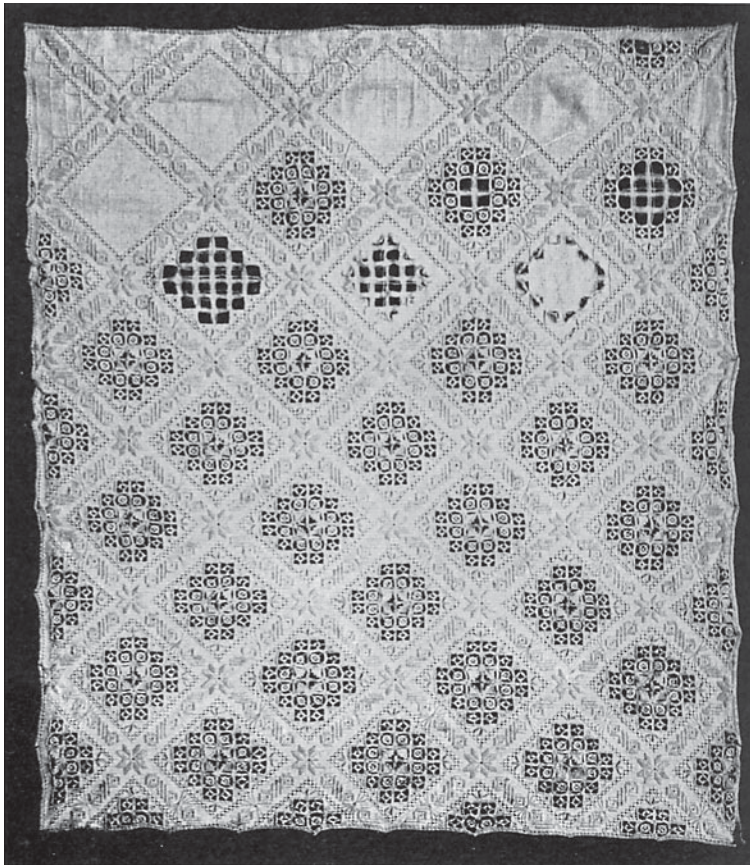
SEEKING to improve the condition of Italian immigrant women and their Italian-American daughters, and to encourage the manufacture of old-time laces and embroideries, a few sympathetic New York women have started the "Scuola D'Industrie Italiane," situated at 28 Macdougall Street. Classes of fifteen to twenty young Italian girls work here every day to reproduce the beautiful lace and lace-like embroideries made in Italy in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This is the first school of the art in America. In Italy lace schools, under the name of "Industrie Femminili Italiane," have been established in large numbers during the last fifty years, and have grown to be powerful forces for good.

Wealthy and influential Italian ladies, under whose auspices these schools were founded, have

had the same motives for their beneficent work—to help the peasant women to a more profitable living, and to put into the world and encourage the use of beautiful things, the manufacture of which had been almost forgotten. It was often a tragic story that marked the beginning of an "Industrie Femminili Italiane" school. Perhaps some blight had fallen over the working power of the village. The harvest had failed, or a storm had damaged the country. In this emergency, near-by wealthy landowners combined to start the old work of lace making among the people. But the art had been so long unpracticed, that at first the fingers were awkward and slow. Yet the artistic feeling and skill, after all, was "in the blood." These women were the great-great-granddaughters of famous lace makers of centuries ago, when as many as ten thousand lace makers lived in a single town. Gradually the fingers grew more supple and the lace better until, at length, the expertness, which only slumbered, came back to the worker.

The story of one beginning is the story of nearly

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PILLOW REGINA (QUEEN MARGHERITA)

all. In the sixteenth century the Island of Burano was a centre for fine lace and embroidery. When the wearing of lace declined and the little that was used was made by machine, the islanders became fishermen for a livelihood. But the fishing industry was destroyed by a hard winter—the severe winter of 1872—and many of the people that season were in danger of starvation. Certain philanthropists proposed to open a lace school. A search was made for a teacher who could instruct the villagers to make laces as beautiful as those produced in former years. At last an old woman was found, Cencia Scarpariola, who was nearly eighty. In her youth she had helped her grandmother to make lace. She was induced to teach all she could of her art to a class of girls.

Many wealthy ladies became interested, and a committee to encourage the sale of these laces was formed, of which Queen Margherita of Italy consented to be president. Countess Marcello was specially indefatigable. She hunted up old pieces of Burano embroidery and lace, had patterns drawn

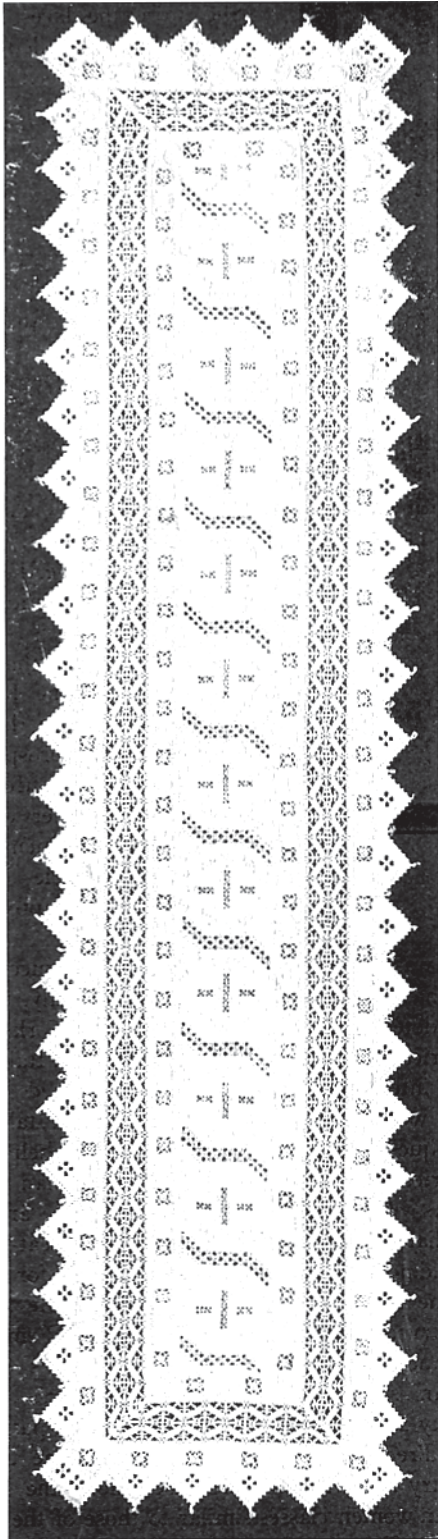
and devised new stitches. She wore the laces everywhere and extolled their beauty. The Queen bought lavishly, and many royal ladies added to their store of beautiful things.

From the first good patterns were used. From Venice came the Renaissance styles, and from churches, convents and castles the still older Gothic and mediæval patterns. These ancient models were carefully copied, the teachers following the design patiently, stitch by stitch. There was for awhile some difficulty about getting the best kind of thread. But, all obstacles surmounted, the Burano lace is said to be more beautiful than any produced since the Renaissance. More than this, the villagers grew prosperous. They no longer depend upon the weather or the harvest. The women work under comfortable conditions and are happy and contented.

It was because these schools are so successful, and have spread so rapidly through Italy, that it was determined to have one in New York. One American woman, spending her winter in Italy, saw with interest the good work accomplished among poor women by “*Industrie Femminili Italiane*,” and questioned if it would not be as helpful in America. Here were thousands of Italian immigrants who laboured amid unwholesome and unfamiliar surroundings in factories and sweat-shops. Would not this industry prove as valuable for them? As the first step it was resolved to invite to this country a patroness of the “*Industrie Femminili Italiane*,” who could show the methods of the Italian school. From the headquarters of the society in Rome Miss Carolina Amari, a patroness and director of the work in Italy, came to this country last winter to organise among the young Italian women classes similar to those of the home school. She only lately returned to Italy.

Miss Amari brought a large assortment of patterns of all styles and dates and adapted to a

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RETICELLA AND LACE COVER

variety of articles, besides many samples of the work of the Italian schools, and a number of pieces of genuine antique work that were lent for the inspiration of the new school. Her pieces were copied, the copies are now used as guides, and she has taken back with her samples of work done by New York pupils which will be put on exhibition at Milan and shown at the Italian schools.

Some obstacles were encountered at first. As soon as they leave school our young Italian girls go to work, usually in factories where they make two or three dollars a week. It was hard to induce them to leave that pittance until they were convinced that the embroidery would be more profitable. It was thus found necessary to pay them something during their apprenticeship. Now these girls, grown skillful, can earn good wages at piece work—from six to eight dollars a week and even more. As soon as a regular market is made for products of the school the girls will find permanent employment at good wages in connection with it. Some of the girls show special adaptability for certain kinds of work. It may be they have inherited this deftness. Anna, for instance, picked up quickly the knack of making “needle lace.” Maria developed a talent for “filet” work, making fine netting with beautiful evenness. Rosina, who previously made \$3.50 a week, now earns \$10 at embroidery.

Conditions under which the girls work are far superior to the average factory surroundings. The work-room is comfortable and well warmed, clean, light, and cheerful. So long as they are not too noisy or lazy, the childish chattering is unchecked. Rosina and Maria talk over their affairs, and laugh and tease each other as freely as at home, and in more comfort. The teacher, Miss D’Annunzio, being a fellow countrywoman, understands the girls’ natures as well as their language (for many of them do not speak English), and besides being a capable instructor she is encouraging and helpful.

Beginning with six girls last November, the class now numbers twenty-one. No money is paid to beginners, as it was at first, for within two weeks the girls begin to do paying work, and there are now more applicants than can be taken. Many apprentices are tried, but if a girl shows no talent, nor willingness to learn after a few weeks’ trial, she is advised to try some other occupation.

The embroideries are on exhibition every Tuesday afternoon at No. 28 Macdougall Street, where the school has rooms in the Richmond Hill Settlement House. A number of handsome pieces have lately been shown at the Arts and Crafts

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RETICELLA WORK, SHOWING PROCESS WITH INSERTED SQUARES

Guild Rooms, No. 109 East Twenty-third Street, and an exhibit was sent to the exhibition of the Society of Artists and Sculptors, in Buffalo, where they were put on view at the Albright Galleries.

Miss Florence Colgate is chairman of the executive committee of the "Scuola D'Industrie Italiane," and its members are Miss Carolina Amari, patroness, Rome, Italy; Miss Elizabeth S. Williams, recording secretary; James D. Merriman, treasurer; Gino C. Speranza, corresponding secretary, and as honorary member, Conte Raybaudi Massiglia, Consul-General of Italy. The advisory board includes Mrs. Robert Abbe, Mrs. A. A. Anderson, Mrs. William Bunker, Miss Emily Carow, Miss Gill, Mrs. Seth Low, Mrs. David Williams, Franklin H. Giddings, George A. Plimpton, Carlo L. Speranza, and an honorary member, Contessa Raybaudi Massiglia. The Society has the encouragement of the Italian Emigration Depart-

ment at Rome, the Charity Organisation Society, the Children's Aid Society, the Italian Chamber of Commerce, the Society for Italian Immigrants, and other public institutions of New York.

Although called "lace," most of the work hitherto done by the school comes properly under the head of "embroidery." The distinction made is that in embroidery there is a material upon which the worker executes the design, instead of creating the fabric as well as the ornament, as is done in lace. Heavy unbleached linen is the material used for the most elaborate

pieces, such as sideboard covers, curtains, pillow covers, bags and brush-and-comb cases. This heavy linen is a most enduring fabric and makes very rich-looking work. It is embroidered with thread of the same colour. A little lighter quality of linen, sometimes white, sometimes light gray, is taken for table covers, bed spreads, of which the separately embroidered squares are joined with an embroidered inserting, and shirt waists; and a fine linen is used for personal wear and table doilies when they are trimmed or mixed with a pillow lace.

Part of this embroidery is decorated in close, and part in open work. A variety of embroidery stitches are used, each producing a special effect, and each of these has a name. The material must have very even threads, as the pattern is produced by counting threads as carefully as if the material were canvas. Of the stitches there is "punto reale," a

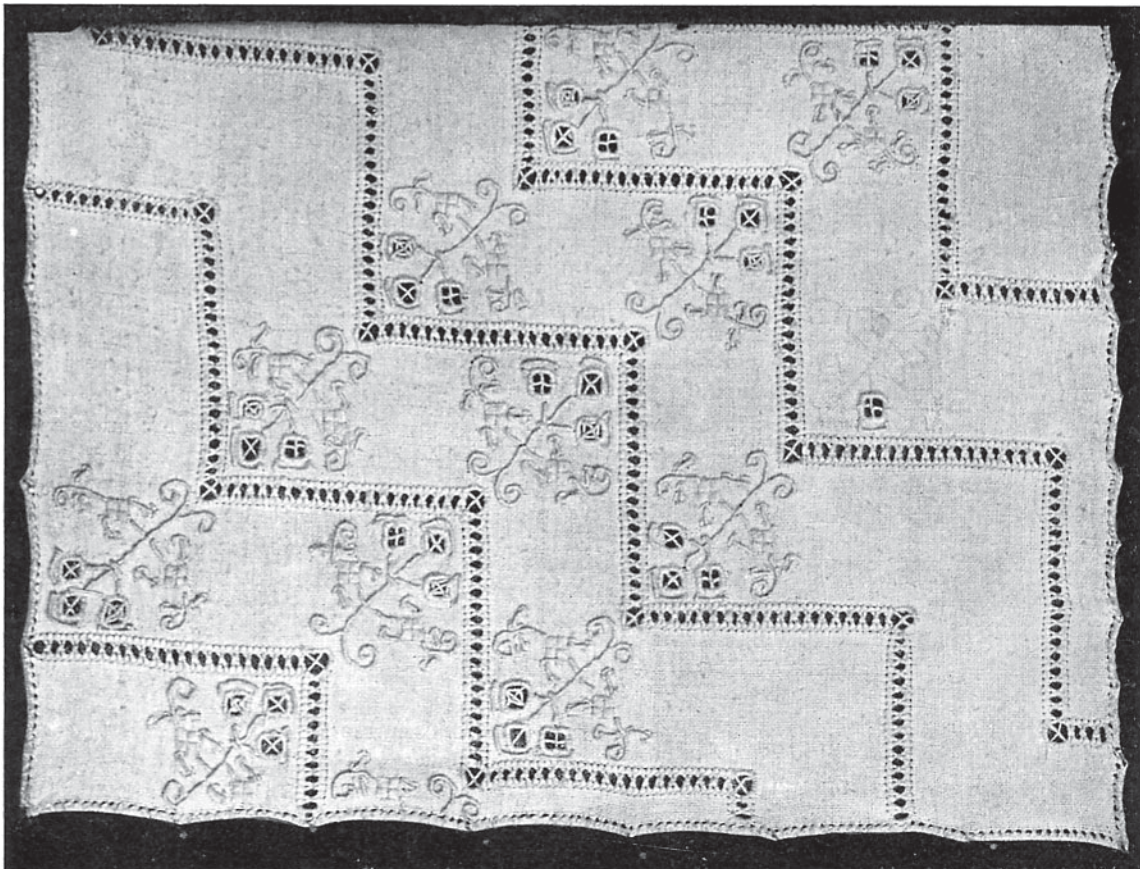
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close heavy work, something like satin stitch; and used for heavy designs; "punto riccio," which makes the curling stems and raised flowers, and which will be more familiar if spoken of as a rope stitch for the flower stems, and buttonhole stitch for the flowers; "punto a retticella" is the open lace-like portions in squares, circles or strips, which alternate with the close pattern. To effect this, part of the material is cut away and part of the threads drawn out, leaving certain threads or groups of threads to hold the opening together. On these threads, supporting them and decorating them, is worked an elaborate open pattern in buttonhole, rope or darning stitches—to give them familiar English names. The edge of the square is finished with "punto quadro," a small cross or square stitch, used to prevent ravelling. This stitch also borders insets or strips of a finer lace. At present these "pillow laces" are imported from the Italian schools, but their manufacture will be taught here this fall.

In "punto traforo" a piece of the linen is entirely

cut away, sometimes groups of pieces, forming a pattern. The edges of the opening are finished with buttonhole stitch. The most elaborate pieces are combinations of all these stitches. If the worker is really artistic and grows expert, she evolves and invents new stitches which may better attain the desired effect. In days when embroidery was a flourishing trade, and the skillful embroiderer an artist, the worker did this, for originality often follows expertness. When one learns to do a thing well, one begins then to learn to omit it. That is genius.

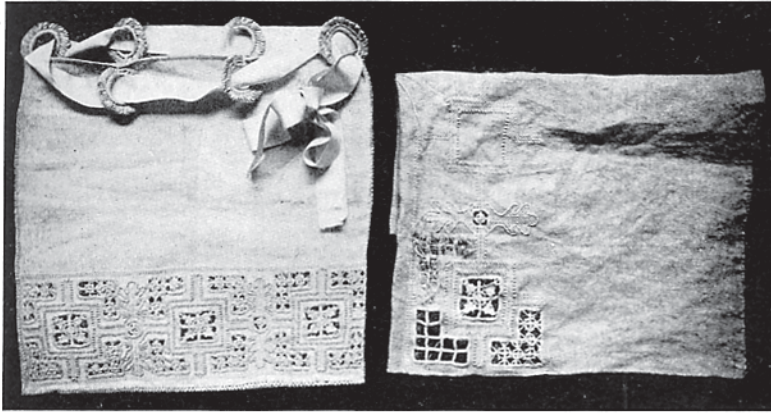
The illustration of the sideboard cover shows reticella squares and irregular figures, with punto reale and punto riccio between. It is on the heaviest linen, and is a mass of embroidery. The border is cut in points, hemmed and finished with a worked edge, and tiny "picot" stitches, and little tassels at each point. The long lace strip of the border is from the Italian school. The original of this piece was brought from Italy by Miss Amari, and is a copy of one preserved in an old Roman family.



PILLOW COVER IN PUNTO RICCIO

ITALIAN SCHOOL, NEW YORK

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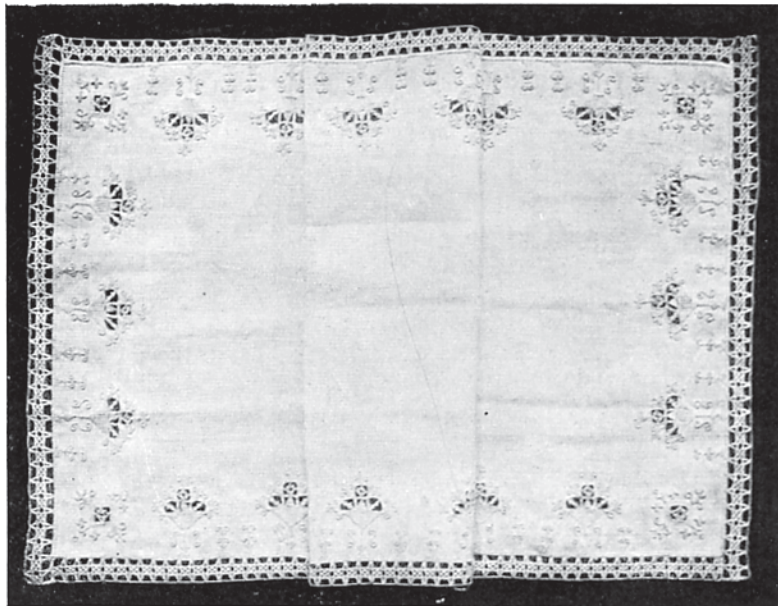
BAG, SHOWING PROCESS

The pillow cover, known as "pillow regina," is also a copy of one in an old Italian collection. The first one of this pattern made by the Italian school was purchased by Queen Margherita. One side of this cushion shows the method of work: each square is in a different stage of manufacture. Some are prepared for working, others partly worked. The sofa pillow, on diagonal lines, is a copy of one made at the New York school, which Miss Amari took to Milan for exhibition. The open work is reticella, and the flower sprays of punto riccio. Bags, as shown in illustration, are in great favour; one will be seen herewith in process of making. All these pieces are on the heaviest sort of linen.

Some novel effects are shown in the sideboard cover with rounding ends, which is a revival of an eighteenth century pattern never before worked in any school. This is a copy of an ancient piece. The border is of pillow lace. The square-cornered sideboard cover, with its quaint design of baskets holding fruits and flowers, shows another combination of stitches. A small table cover of lighter linen has squares of punto traforo alternating with squares of "filet" lace. The traforo squares have small lace insets. The filet squares are of fine netting, with

the pattern darned in the net. The mediæval patterns used date from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This darned netting is now taught at the New York school. The filet is made by the ordinary netting process, done with a very fine needle and thread, and the pattern darned in, either in open or close work. This lace has a square mesh, but another style is darned on lace that has a mesh like maline or bobinet. This is darned in flowing scrolls of a Gothic appearance and is used appropriately to edge altar cloths, heavy covers, curtains and priests' robes.

Appliqué on satin and velvet is also to be taught. For this, patterns used in such work during the middle ages will be brought from Italy. The thin linen scarf has a border and small squares of reticella. The large lace insets are fine reticella work. In this, the design is left and the threads surrounding it are partly pulled out and a background worked on the remaining threads. The old Roman blouse displays several specialties of the school.



RETICELLA LACE AND COVER

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One is the narrow reticella inserting which holds the parts together. Another is the wide lace, made of reticella squares sewn together. And the Roman smocking, done in even style, and held together with groups of punto riccio, is still another odd feature. The making of fine linen shirt waists, some elaborately embroidered, is one of the industries of the school.

Both the style of work and the patterns used are of the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Many pieces are exact copies of articles of that date, preserved in families, churches or convents. They



COPY OF ROMAN BLOUSE



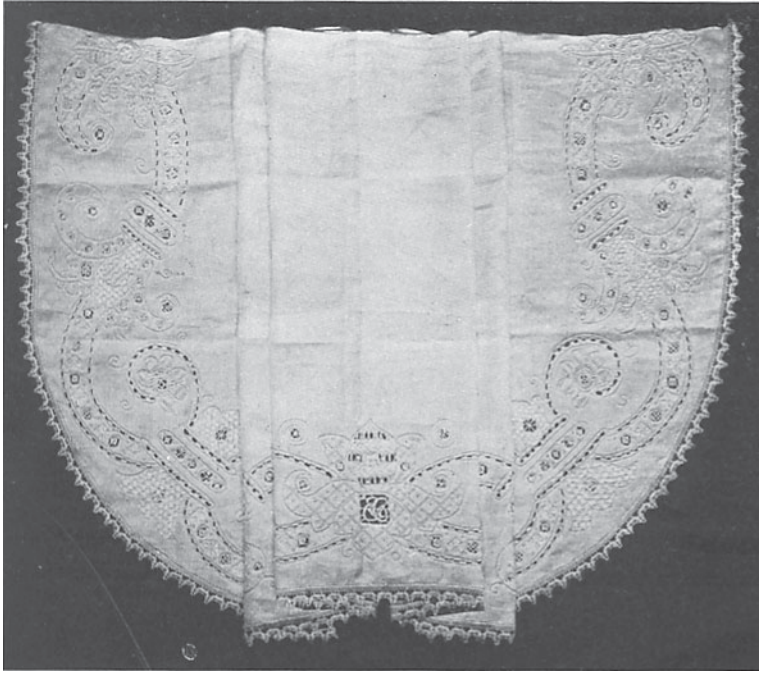
BAGS IN RETICELLA

represent a class of embroidery little known and more seldom seen. It is executed with the patience and artistic finish inherent in the Italian nature. The embroideries are beautiful from the decorative standpoint, and are well worth examination. They are, besides, wonderfully durable. There are pieces extant three or four hundred years old.

The clever mingling of open and close embroidery is one of the characteristic features, giving a unique individuality. This combination of open and close embroidery not only stamps the character of the finished work, but marks the period of its first manufacture. Studying the history of embroidery and lace, one comes to the conclusion that the point coupe of the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries characterised the first happy mingling of embroidery and lace, and marked the transition from one to the other. The first woman who, tired of working upon stuff, cut a hole in it and worked around that, had an ideal of lace making in her mind and began, however crudely, to make it.

Embroidery dates from the earliest times. Samples found in early Egyptian tombs, and pictures preserved on stone, prove that. But true lace making did not antedate the fifteenth century. Before that time embroidery upon linen, silk, satin or velvet had grown to be an elaborate art. Beginning with few and simple stitches, these tentative

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EIGHTEENTH CENTURY PATTERN

attempts at adornment grew to marvellous elaborateness. Immense pictures of weddings, festivities, processions and tournaments were embroidered in detail, the background filled with pattern laid on pattern, until the exquisite materials used were covered with the costly threads of gold and silver as well as silk. This magnificent work, when applied to clothes, made them so heavy that such garments were used only for state occasions.

The first idea of lightness was introduced into this embroidery about the end of the fifteenth century, when skillful embroiderers discovered that by cutting out selected spaces in the design, and filling these with a pattern, the work possessed a new character. And this was the beginning of reticella which, in its turn, marked the passing of embroidery into lace. Its use was at first confined to the church or to royal robes, for it was costly. Its manufacture became the industry of convents, certain of which were famous for their lace schools. The nuns taught their pupils and these, in turn, taught the peasant women of France and Italy. Reticella, worked on robes, or on bands to edge various articles, was sold and was popular at once. It soon became the favourite trimming of royal and princely dames. Queen Elizabeth of England had stores of reticella and so had the ladies of every court of Europe. Its manufacture also grew fashionable, for about the middle of the sixteenth

century books of instruction in the art of making reticella were published in Italy and Germany, and fine ladies took up the pastime and devoted hours to it. Other laces which came into vogue about this time were "drawn work," and "darned netting." The little instruction books taught these, too. Both of these have somewhat of the character of embroidery. As these grew more fashionable and were manufactured and sold in greater amount, workers grew more skillful. Each period and country had its characteristic patterns.

About this time pillow lace first made its appearance. It was described as "a style of needlework

which differs from embroidery in not being wrought upon any foundation whatever." The oldest painting in which lace is shown is in the Academy at Venice, *A Portrait of a Lady*, by Carpaccio, who died about 1523. When lace "made without foundation," first appeared it was called "Punto in Aria," or, point in the air, a name peculiarly appropriate. It was for a time regarded as a species of embroidery, and was long in acquiring an independent character. But once started, this "stitch in the air" became the rage. It was worn in immense quantities as borders for ruffs, mantles, cuffs, sleeves, and trimming for all sorts of things. By the opening of the eighteenth century the lighter lace had nearly superseded the heavier embroidery of a former age. The latter became neglected, and, although its expense and enduring nature caused pieces of it to be preserved as heirlooms and curiosities, the method of manufacture of these beautiful laces was well nigh forgotten. It was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that a revival of ancient embroideries took place.

The Scuola D'Industrie Italiane proposes to have two exhibitions each year: one in the fall, when it will show its more elaborate and handsomer pieces, and one in the spring, displaying the lighter and more personal articles, such as collars, cuffs, shirt waists and aprons.