

Italian Lace Making a New York Industry

EVERY morning daughters of Italy gather in a big, sunny room in Richmond Hill house, at 23 MacDougal street, for instruction in an industry that until recently was spoken of as a lost art—namely, lace making. Put these same girls in a factory and they would partake of the sordidness of their surroundings. Here there is an immediate reversion to the picturesque type. As they sit, some of them bending over the square pillows, some plying the needles, some busy with bobbins or winding bits of thread, they are a revelation of the charm and beauty of lace making.

Miss Carolina Amari is at present instructing the class. In speaking of the lace making revival she emphasizes the Italian's inborn distaste for the mechanical trades. They are, she says, essentially individualists and must be treated as such in order to get the best out of them.

"The lace schools which now flourish all over Italy were established principally to revive the dormant art of our grandmothers, as well as to prevent, if possible, the enormous loss of population due to emigration, which, in turn, came about from lack of employment," she said.

"Here we have established a similar school to help the emigrants to live in their proper environment, to earn their living as they are best fitted.

"The soul of the Italian is attuned to the beautiful. The sweatshop, the factory, the telephone and telegraph booth exert a most deplorable effect on Italian women. They soon become uninterested in their work, then they are irritable and finally unmanageable. They are trying to fit themselves to the wrong frame.

"Some of the brightest and best girls we have here came after a nervous breakdown in some factory. With us we have absolutely no friction. They love their work, they never make excuses to be absent, and it is no uncommon experience to hear them beg to remain after the working day is over to finish some pattern.

"We find nothing surprising in this. The American girl of the same class is born with a different inheritance. When she earns her living she turns naturally to commercial means, therefore, but for generations Italian women have worked at the looms in their own homes usually, always in a pleasant, attractive environment. The love of this work is in their blood, just as the clicking of machinery brings a thrill of pride and understanding to the Anglo-Saxon.

"We can take a green Italian girl into the workshop and in a few weeks she is working at the most intricate patterns as if she had never done anything else. She has an inherent knowledge of line and form. She handles these famous patterns as if she could read in them the stories and romances that are an intrinsic part of their value.

"In my own experience in Italy I have known workmen who have been employed in the famous glass factories of Venice and who have broken down when put at work in a factory where only cheap



THE SHOW ROOMS.

she said. "At my villa, Tresuano, near Florence, it was no unusual experience for a peasant woman to come and beg me to help her to recall some old lace stitch which her mother or grandmother used to make.

"At length I formed a small class, and this gradually grew into a school without my realizing the responsibility I had assumed. I have always been specially interested in the revival of the old Sicilian lace stitches that are very popular here in America and I tried to focus our attention on those, with great success.

"My experience was duplicated by hundreds of other Italian ladies living on estates all over the country, and from these

begin to send me samples of their laces to copy. Some of these pieces were absolutely invaluable; once lost or destroyed the particular pattern would be gone forever.

"My sister took photographs of all these patterns and at the same time I commenced to form a collection by purchase, exchange and through the many gifts which represented the good will of my people. It is from these samples that many forgotten stitches have been revived.

"Many American women who have married Italian men have gone into this work and labor side by side with their Italian friends for the betterment of conditions over there. Generally speaking they leave the question of artistic fitness to the native born while they handle the practical interests with great judgment.

"The Countess di Brazza, who was Miss Slocum of New Orleans is one of these. In Bologna the Countess Lina Cavazza has a school for old embroideries. The Marchesa Etta de Viti de Marco, who was Miss Dunham, a New York girl, has two schools, a pillow lace school in the Abruzzi and a needle embroidery school in Casamassella, near Otranto. Marchesa di Sorbella, also an American woman, who was a Miss Robert before her marriage, has a school near Perugia for rare stitches in colored embroidery. Miss Minnie Luck, an English woman, has a school for pillow lace in the Abruzzi.

"Naturally, in time we turned our attention to America. This little school is the result. When I tell you that less than two years ago we started with a capital of \$3,000 and during the first twelve months had sold and taken orders for about \$3,000 worth of goods, you can see that we took a right estimate of our countrywomen's possibilities.

"For the household linen we have revived the use of the old missal letters, as they are shown in the illuminated parchments and in the old patterns. These letters are complex enough to suit the most elaborate taste, or simple, if one prefers, but their lines are exquisite.

"Sometimes we have them inset into the sheets; sometimes they are merely embroidered on them, as taste and economy suggest. For the towels we use a great deal of the old blue linen embroidery and smaller letters of the same missal origin.

"The most popular article we have sold, both in New York and in London, is the so-called Dante hood. You can't look at one of them without recalling an old Italian picture. Nearly every household that boasts any kind of lace collection has a number of these caps and many patterns. They are becoming to nearly every face and are being used extensively as opera hoods. Some of the patterns cost \$40, some \$100, but they are well worth what they cost, for they cannot be duplicated in cheaper wares.

"Many of these laces are exact copies of drawings found in frescoes in old Italian palaces and churches. The only two hand looms in the world for making the net, or net, which forms the groundwork of many of the most beautiful patterns, are located in Rome and are the property of the society. Some of the net is made, as we do it here, with a needle, but for the larger pieces the loom work is more practical, and so I bring over a quantity of it each time for the classes to use.

"The Italian women are very fond of bags; they use them for half a hundred purposes, for the handkerchief, for the half-finished embroidery, for the laundry, and models of many bags are shown from the tiny one that holds the piece of lace called handkerchief to the solid mass of embroidery that opens for the sofa cushion.

"These many bags are finished with the quiet fastenings that centuries ago took the place of buttons, oblong bits of solid embroidery that slip into eyelets.

"Many of the articles have another historical finishing, the little tassels, like bunches of white currants, called ciandilli, familiar to every lace worker and lace lover of Italy. Sometimes on the dollies these tassels have for substitutes a flat pendant, daintily attached, the copy of a

flower or a heraldic design. One set of these now on exhibition is of the sheerset linen, inset with the frenal square, and at the corners hang the lilies of Florence in a conventional design.

"The Roman blouse, an inevitable part of every peasant's wardrobe, is represented with many styles of embroideries.

"The garment originally was intended to slip over the head. It is cut square in the neck and under the arm goes inset gives perfect freedom of arm motion, a necessity where lifting baskets to the head and holding them in place is a part of the regular routine. Our shirt waist is the natural evolution of this garment, but is not half so attractive.

"The designs exhibited, which have been made in the lace shop here, have row after row of embroidery and exquisite smocking, which follow patterns that generations ago were made for this special garment. The wardrobes of the Italian women of rank contain many of these contadina blouses, some of them a mass of solid embroidery, some on exquisite silks, others again cowwebs of gold.

"The blouse pattern is modified slightly


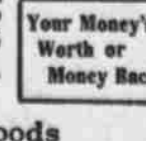
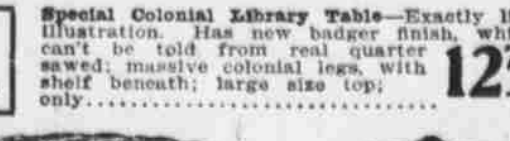



for the American and English waists, for while the extra fullness under the arms is very adaptable to a slim figure, the Anglo-Saxons prefer the closer fitting. The prices of these contadina blouses range from \$20 to \$50, and even higher, according to the amount of work upon them.

There is also a copy of a famous eighteenth century blouse which, like the others, is a mass of wonderful stitches. It has the elbow sleeves of the modern waist and is cut in a curved line about the neck.

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THE DANTE HOOD.

products were made, to return to health and happiness when once more set at the work to which they were accustomed, every piece of which brought a feeling of artistic satisfaction to the most humble artisan. They are the people who, when the Campanile fell, went through the streets with tears running down their cheeks in their grief over the loss of their wonderful tower.

In order to explain the lace school here Miss Amari explained the schools on the other side as an introduction.

"My own school is a sample of many,"

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A FEW OF THE WORKERS.

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Prattle of the Youngsters

A teacher in one of the primary schools of New York recently read to her pupils "The Old Oaken Bucket."

After explaining the song to them very carefully, she asked the class to copy the first stanza from the blackboard, where she had written it, and try to illustrate the verse by drawings in the same way a story is illustrated.

In a short while one little girl handed up her slate with several little dots between two lines, a circle, half a dozen dots, and three buckets.

"I do not quite understand this, Maimy," said the teacher, kindly. "What is that circle?"

"Oh, that's the well," Maimy replied.

"And why do you have three buckets?" again asked the teacher.

"One," answered the child, "is the oaken bucket, one is the iron-bound bucket, and the other is the moss-covered bucket that hung in the well."

"But, Maimy, what are all these little dots for?"

"Why, those are the spots which my infancy knew," earnestly replied Maimy.—Harper's Weekly.

"Every package of oat breakfast food," said little Willie, "has a picture on it of a big, strong man and it says he eats it every day."

"Dat must be a fake," replied Tommy. "Why he's big and strong enough to fight anybody dat tried to make him eat dat stuff."

Alta's mother was ill and Alta had been asked to make the coffee, using half an egg to settle it. The problem was too much for the little girl, who came running sisted on walking down alone.

to her mother, a knife in one hand and an egg in the other, and asked: "How do you cut an egg in half without spilling it?"

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"Ma," said little Tommy, "what time was it when I was born?"

"A little after 6 o'clock in the evening," replied his mother.

"My goodness! Why, it was time to go to bed before I got a chance to celebrate that birthday, wasn't it?"

Little Louise, about to go away on a long journey, was saying goodbye to one of her father's old friends. "Well," said the old gentleman, "I suppose that when I see you again you will be a big woman and you will have little girls like yourself."

"No, sir," said Louise. "I am never going to marry; I am going to be a widow all my life."



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