

Lace-Making—Oldest of Crafts— Has Its Devotees In New Zealand

Christchurch Girl, of French Descent, has Mastered the Art

LACE is always exquisite, and down through the ages fashion has dictated it for its daintiness and appeal to both sexes. Most men will admit that from earliest childhood they have always had a weakness for lace.

In these days hand-made lace can scarcely be made for commercial purposes, though it is so fascinating that no doubt many girls, with a real love for beautiful handiwork, would enjoy making it and could create for themselves rare and exquisite examples of the craft if the opportunity to learn occurred.

Miss Marian Thomson, of Christchurch, is a New Zealand girl who had the opportunity to learn at a very early age. Both her grand-parents on her mother's side were French, and her mother, who had watched the lace-makers working in Brittany, taught her daughter many of the intricate secrets of the art. A few years ago Miss Thomson made a wedding veil for her cousin in Honolulu, and in her spare time worked herself a glorious evening frock. Miss Thomson was asked to exhibit this frock at the Christchurch Winter Show this year. It attracted a great deal of attention, and was admired by Lady Bledisloe, who has on several occasions sought out this Christchurch girl's marquetry souvenirs for sending overseas. Miss Thomson is an artist who is well-known for her clever paintings of New Zealand scenes, Maori portraits and native flora and fauna, which she does on plaques, powder bowls and other such articles.

From earliest childhood, Miss Thomson has been surrounded by an artistic atmosphere and in her studio in New Regent Street, Christchurch's quaint Spanish street, she has many valuable paintings, including paintings by Van der Velden, a famous pastoral landscape by Arnesby Brown, a portrait of the late Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson in her garden, painted by Neril, etchings by Millais and Clausen and other notable artists.

Miss Thomson, who is as dainty as the lace which she has on display, said, in her interview with the "Radio Record" representative who called on her, that she has read a great deal about the history of lace, as she finds the subject such an interesting one. "The origin of lace is rather obscure, but the Jewish embroiderers, even in early times, seem to have carried their art to a high standard of execution, because in the English Bible lace is frequently mentioned," said Miss Thomson. "With the Egyptians the art of embroidery was general, examples of elaborate netting having been found in Egyptian tombs. The Sidonian women brought by Paris to Troy embroidered veils of such rich work that Hecuba deemed them worthy of being offered to Athene, and Lucan spoke of the Sidonian veil worn by Cleopatra at a feast in her Alexandrine palace in honour of Caesar.

"In the London chronicle of 1767 will be found a curious account of the opening of a Scandinavian barrow near Wareham in Dorsetshire. Within the hollow trunk of an oak were discovered many bones wrapped in a covering of deerskins neatly sewn together. There were also the remains of a piece of gold lace of the most ancient and universal of all designs found depicted on the coats of ancient Danes.

"Passing to the first stages of the Christian era, we find the Pontifical ornaments, altar cloths and draperies in the churches worked with holy images. In the middle ages spinning and needlework were the occupation of women of all degrees. Long before the Conquest Anglo-Saxon women were skilled with the needle

"The lace industry found its way to Devonshire by Flemish refugees flying from the persecutions of the Duke of Alva and many of the great houses in England are store houses of old needlework.

From her constant intercourse with France, lace must have been early known in Scotland, lace making being first mentioned there in 1621. The needlework of Scotland's Mary is too well known to require mention. The women of Ireland possess an undoubted aptitude for lace making. Irish Point lace owes its origin to the failure of the potato crop in 1846 and its original inspiration was given by a piece of Point de Milan which fell into the hands of the Reverend Mother of a Convent in County Cork. She conceived the idea of setting up an industry for the children attending her school and studied the lace, unravelled the threads one by one and succeeded in mastering the details which she taught to her pupils.

"Lace first appeared in France in 1540 when Henri II. adopted the fashion of lace ruffs to conceal a scar. Lace is much in evidence in a portrait of him painted at Versailles. To the Italian influences of the 16th century France owes the fashion for point lace. By 1673 the art of lace-making had spread far and wide through the district about Alencon. Children of 7 years of age, and aged men earned their daily bread by it, and the shepherdesses worked at their lace while herding their flocks. The approval of Louis XIV who was much interested in the work was the fortune of Alencon; point de France adopted by Court etiquette, the wearing of it became compulsory at Versailles. Point de France supplanted that of Venice from which it was originally copied, but its price confined its use to the rich, and when the wearing of lace became general, those who could not afford so costly a production replaced it by the more moderate pillow lace.

"In this luxury, however, England followed her sister kingdom, for we read in the Royal Magazine of 1763 that on the Baptism of the young Prince, afterwards Duke of York, the company went to the Council Chamber at St. James's, where a splendid bed was set up for the Queen to sit on, the counterpane of which is described as being inimitable workmanship, the lace alone costing £3,783 sterling.

"Napoleon was a great lover of lace; he admired it as a work of art, and was proud of the proficiency of his subjects. France is a lace-making as well as a lace-wearing country. Of the half a million of lace-makers in Europe, nearly a quarter of a million are estimated as belonging to France, but, with the introduction of machinery, handwork has become more rare."

Miss Thomson said that it took her two years to make her evening frock, which she made in her spare time. It is mounted over palest pink banded and gathered georgette. The bodice is tight-fitting, and over it lightly falls a lace cape fastening at the side and edged with soft, white fur. This delightful original blue frock is most becoming to its fair creator with pansy eyes, who regrets that her work of painting New Zealand souvenirs leaves her so little time for her fascinating hobby of lace-making.



—Steffano Webb, photo.

Miss Marian Thomson, of Christchurch, who has mastered the difficult art of lace-making. Her grandparents hailed from Brittany where lace-making has been practiced for many centuries.