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A LEGEND OF THE ORIGIN OF LACE.

By F. A. MITCHEL.
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A mention of the word Venice always suggests something delicately artistic. Perhaps the beauty of a city arising out of the sea is the fundamental cause of this. Its founders, driven in the fifth century from the mainland by Attila the Hun, took refuge among the lagoons and built the only city in the world similarly situated. Eight hundred years later Venice became mistress of all seas.

It was at this time of her supremacy that one afternoon a girl sat at a window engaged in fine needlework. Now and again she would glance out of the window over the Adriatic spread before her. At one of these glances she saw the sun gild the sails of an incoming vessel. She dropped her work, ran down and out to the dock. There she watched the vessel approach and at last cast anchor, when a boat was lowered and pulled to the shore. As soon as it touched the dock a young sailor jumped out, ran to the girl, and they were locked in a lovers' embrace.

The lovers did not long remain where they were, but hurried to the girl's home, where they asked and answered quick questions as to what had transpired during their separation. Then the young man produced a bunch of delicate coralline and handed it to her.

"I have brought this for you, Francesca, as a gift most fitted to please one who is so fond of minute workmanship. It is lace made by mermaids in the coral caverns under the waters of the seas of India."

Francesca took the coralline and examined it, admiring its beautiful texture.

"It is indeed beautiful, Giovanni, but pretty as it is I will make something prettier."

"How?" asked the lover, surprised.

"With my needle."

"That is impossible. I know how expert you are in such work, but you can never equal this. At any rate, I, who have visited every country, have never seen anything like it."

"That may be. Nevertheless I will do as I say. When the day for our wedding comes you shall see what I have made. It shall be a bridal veil of mermaid's lace."

Shortly after this the young man sailed away again. From her window Francesca watched the white wings that bore him from her till they faded into a mist on the horizon; then she began her work. She had hunted the city for a finer thread than she had ever had before—such a thread as the mermaids had used—and, failing to find it, had induced a spinner to make some for her. It was almost as fine as a spider's web. This thread she now began to weave into the delicate figures made by the mermaids. Day by day she worked with her needle, forming little white knots and tiny stars, uniting them by delicate "brides."

A month passed, and she had produced as much in length as she could span with her thumb and little finger. She was delighted with it. Month after month she worked on, barely giving her eyes the rest they needed, till at last she had produced a long bridal veil that would reach from her head to the floor. When waved slowly in the air it resembled a white cloud floating in the heavens, but when the vision was permitted to rest upon its texture it was found to be marvelously beautiful.

One of Francesca's friends told about the wonderful mermaid lace that was being created for a bridal veil, and its fame was soon spread abroad. One of the highborn Venetian dames heard of it and went to Francesca's home to see it. Francesca showed it to her, and she went away to tell her friends that it was a new creation in feminine apparel. Then others saw it, and as each pronounced upon it its fame grew till all the aristocratic women in the city were talking, wondering, envying.

Francesca was completing her work, sitting by her window, watching, as before, for the return of her lover, when his ship came in. This time she waited for him to come to her. As he entered the room she held the white cloud aloft.

"See," she said, "what I have done. Compare it with your gift and see which is the more beautiful."

When the wedding day arrived a crowd was waiting at her gondola that was to bear her to the church. As the bridal party was poled along the canal the windows were crowded with women waiting to catch a glimpse of the wonderful veil. They could only see what looked like a mist arising from Francesca's head and floating about her shoulders. When they reached the church many ladies were waiting near the altar. These crowded about the locality of the bride, and the solemnity of the ceremony was marred by the attention given the veil and the exclamations of wonder at its marvelous beauty.

More than six centuries have passed since the caves under the Indian seas gave up the work of the coral insect on which to base a pattern for mermaid lace. Many fingers have been employed, many eyes have been dimmed, in its manufacture. The thread that has since been used has been made so fine that it will snap in frosty weather. But it is no longer called mermaid lace. Machinery has taken up the work of making lace, and to distinguish that made by hand from that made by the loom the former is called gupure.

ALEC TILTON'S FIND.

By ESTHER VANDEVEER.
[Copyright, 1909, by American Press Association.]

Alexander Tilton, a young American of twenty-five with an inherited fortune estimated at from seven to twelve millions, after being graduated at college went abroad for travel. One day while walking alone in the fashionable residential portion of London he stopped to witness an auction of household furniture in one of the fashionable houses. During the sale he espied a lady's writing desk that struck his fancy, one of those spindle shanked affairs that our great-grandmothers regarded very pretty and which one prizes for their age. Tilton bid on the desk, and it was knocked down to him.

Among those who attended the sale was a young man who evidently took a great interest in the proceedings. Whenever a bookcase, a cabinet, a table—indeed, anything with even a single drawer in it—was put up he examined it closely, and several articles of the kind he bid in. When Tilton bought the lady's desk this man was out of the room. When he found that it had been sold during his absence he went to its purchaser and offered him a fine profit. Tilton didn't like the man's looks and was suspicious of his reason for wanting the article, and when the would be purchaser offered him a bonus of £100 for his bargain he felt sure there was some especial reason why the man wanted it. As money was no object to Tilton he would listen to no offer whatever. Indeed, fearing that he might be surreptitiously deprived of his purchase, he had the desk packed at once and superintended its removal to his hotel.

There he made a thorough examination of it. Every drawer was empty. He took a little hammer and tapped all over it to discover if there was any compartment that was not apparent. No sound indicated such a space. He pulled out every drawer and turned it upside down on the floor; then examined the wood against which the back of the drawers rested when shut. His next move was to unscrew the back of the desk and take it off. Out fell several papers yellow with age. All but one were love letters, and that was a certificate of marriage between Reginald Leighton and Eugenia Booth.

What had impelled Tilton to pursue this hunt he could not explain even to himself. Nor could he now explain what prompted him to start on another hunt in search of Reginald Leighton and Eugenia Booth. Inquiry told him that the house containing the desk had belonged to Sir Spafford Leighton, the father of Reginald Leighton, and that Reginald had died in America. Reginald's older brother, Sir Arthur Leighton, had recently died childless, and the title and estate had passed to Digby Moore, a distant connection of the Leighton family. This Digby Moore was the man who wished to possess the desk. Eugenia Booth had been lady's companion to Reginald and Arthur Leighton's mother. When Reginald went to America Eugenia had left the service of the Leighton family.

Reginald being dead, Tilton's search was for his wife. But as it did not appear that she had ever passed under the name of Leighton he concluded to hunt for her as Eugenia Booth.

After a long investigation he found that fifteen years before she had gone to America. Tilton took the next steamer for home. One of the letters he found in the desk was from Reginald to Eugenia from a ranch in Idaho. Thither he went and discovered that Reginald Leighton had been dead fifteen years—that at the time of his death a woman appeared who claimed to be his wife; but, having no evidence to prove her marriage with him, her claims had not been admitted.

After spending much money on a staff of assistants he employed to investigate every woman by the name of Leighton living in America Tilton at last traced the widow to a western city. There he found her, broken in health, supported by a daughter, Beatrice, a teacher in the public schools. They lived in a ramshackle cottage and in a narrow street. When Tilton went there he was admitted by Beatrice. He asked to see her mother and was admitted to a room where she sat in an easy chair propped up with pillows.

"Mrs. Leighton," he said, "twenty-two years ago you were secretly married to Reginald Leighton."

"I was," said the lady, wonder stricken at this coming from a stranger.

"Where did you put the certificate of your marriage?"

"In Lady Leighton's desk. It was stolen from there by some of the family who were my enemies."

"You are mistaken. It slipped down behind the drawer. Here it is."

The expression on the woman's face as she looked upon the long lost document was indescribable. Then she turned from it to Tilton in a confused wonder. He told his story. When he had finished he drew his check for all the funds mother and daughter would require for a trip to England to establish their claim to the Leighton estate. With the certificate of marriage and a certificate of Beatrice's birth dated eleven months after the marriage they had no trouble in establishing their claim and dispossessing the man who was so anxious to possess Lady Leighton's desk.

Tilton soon after they had entered into possession of their property went abroad at Mrs. Leighton's invitation. He brought Beatrice Leighton back as his wife, and this was the end of the Leighton family in England and the continuance of the Tilton family in America.

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