

Even as early as King Henry III.³⁷ we have a notice "to purchase robes at the fair of St. Ives, for the use of Richard our brother;" and in the dramas of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we find constant allusion to these provincial markets:—³⁸

"Seven
Pedlars' shops, nay all Sturbridge fair,³⁹ will
Scarce furnish her."⁴⁰

The custom of carrying lace from house to house still exists in Belgium, where, at Spa and other places, colporteurs,⁴¹ with packs similar to those borne by our pedlars, bring round to the visitors laces of great value, which they sell at cheaper rates than those exposed in the shops.⁴²

Many travellers, too, through the counties of Buckingham and Bedford, or the more southern regions of Devon, will still call to mind the inevitable lace box handed round for purchase by the waiter at the conclusion of the inn dinner; as well as the girls who, awaiting the arrival of each travelling carriage or postchaise, climbed up to the windows of the vehicle, rarely allowing the occupants to go their way until they had purchased some article of the wares so pertinaciously offered to their inspection.

³⁷ 10 Hen. III., Devon's "Issues of the Exchequer."

³⁸ "No lace-woman," says Ben Jonson, "that brings French masks and cutworks." That lace was sold by pedlars in the time of Henry VIII., we find from a play, "The Four P's," written in 1544, by John Heywood. Among the contents of a pedlar's box are given "lasses knotted," "laces round and flat for women's heads," "sleve laces," &c.

On opening the box of the murdered pedlar ("Fool of Quality," 1766), "they found therein silk, linen, laces," &c.

³⁹ Defoe describes Sturbridge fair as the greatest of all Europe. "Nor," says he, "are the fairs of Leipsig in Saxony, the Mart at Frankfort-on-the-Maine, or the fair of Nuremburg or Augsburg, any way comparable to this fair of Sturbridge."

In 1423, the citizens of London and the suburbs being accused of sending works of "embroidery of gold, or silver, of Cipre, or of gold of Luk, togedre with Spanish Laton of insuffisant stuff to the fayres of Sturesbrugg, Ely, Oxenford, and Salisbury"—in fact, of palming off inferior goods for country use—"all such are forfeited."—*Rot. Parl.* 2 Hen. VI. Nu. 49.

⁴⁰ "Lingua, or the Combat of the Tongue," a Comedy, 1607.

⁴¹ This system of colporteurs dates from the early Greeks. They are termed both in Greek and Hebrew, "voyageurs."

⁴² "She came to the house under the pretence of offering some lace, holland, and fine tea, remarkably cheap."—*Female Spectator*, 1757.