

CHAPTER XVIII.

AUVERGNE AND VÉLAY.

LE PUY (DÉP. HAUTE-LOIRE).

As early as the fifteenth century, the countrywomen of the mountains of the Velay would congregate together during the winter within the walls of the neighbouring cities, and there, forming themselves into companies, gain their subsistence by making coarse lace, to ornament the albs of the priests, the rochets of the bishops, and the petticoats of ladies of quality. And very coarse and tasteless were these early products, to judge from the specimens which remain tacked on to faded altar-cloths, still to be met with in the province, a mixture of netting and darning without design. They also made what was termed "dentelles de menage," with the coarse thread they used for weaving their cloth. They edged their linen with it, and both bleached together in the wearing.

This lace region of Central France, of which Le Puy is the chief place, is considered to be the most ancient and considerable in France. It is distributed over the four departments,¹ and employs from 125,000 to 130,000 women. It forms the sole industry of the Haute-Loire, in which department alone are 70,000 lace-makers.

The lace industry of Le Puy, like all others, has experienced various changes; it has had its trials² and its periods of great prosperity.³ In the chronicles of Le Puy of the sixteenth century⁴ we read that the merciers of Notre-Dame-des-Anges, "qui, suivant l'usage, faisaient dans notre ville le commerce des passementeries, broderies, dentelles etc., comptaient alors quarante boutiques, et

¹ Haut-Loire, Cantal, Puy-de-Dôme, and Loire.

² 1640.

³ 1833 and 1848.

⁴ By Medecis.