

HISTORY OF A NEEDLE,

BY
EDGAR R. S. BARTLEET.



Stratford-on-Avon Church.

Original Sketches by George Bernasconi.

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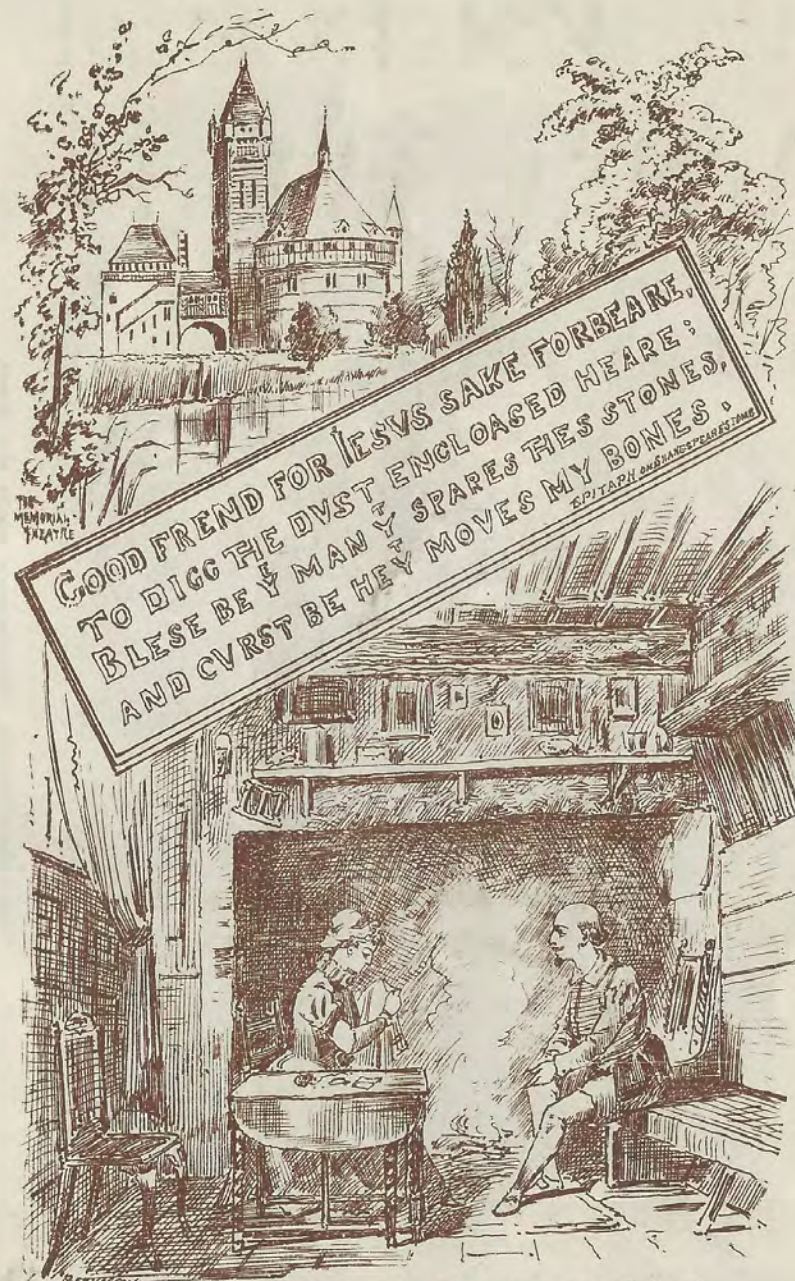
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WORKS:
KILBIRNIE, SCOTLAND.

[2]



1.—Memorial Theatre. 2.—Shakespeare's Epitaph.
3.—Interior of Ann Hathaway's Cottage.

[3]



Charlecote, where Shakespeare stole the Deer.

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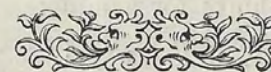


Stratford-on-Avon Church.

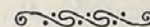
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The History of a Needle.



BUSILY and deftly plying her needle, sits a little Anglo-Saxon maid, the sunlight through the open window casting a halo round her golden tresses and lighting up a bonny face bronzed by the Antipodean sun. Every now and again, as she finishes a seam of the doll's dress on which she is working, she gives a merry laugh and proudly admires her handiwork.

Sitting in an easy chair beside the little maiden reclines a fair-haired woman, who looks with fond pride at the pretty picture near her.

Through the open window comes the never-ceasing hum of the great city of Melbourne and the incessant cry of the newspaper vendors.

After awhile, the little maid tires of her work, and coming up to her mother throws her arms round Mrs. Stanley's neck and caresses her fair hair, her own golden tresses shining like sunbeams on a summer's day. "Mother, dear," says the child with her winning voice, "tell me the story you have so long promised of our old home in England and of your work in the Needle Manufactory, and how the eye of a needle can possibly be pierced."

Mary nestles down into her mother's lap and gazing

upwards with rapt attention waits for the long-promised story.

Mrs. Stanley thinks for a minute, and her eyes fill with tears as the memories of the past crowd back upon her. Mary, seeing her distress, says soothingly, "Darling mother, let us talk of something else if the wished for subject pains you;" but the mother, pushing back the golden tresses from her brow, tells the following story of her old home.

"My dear Mary," says she, "my birthplace was the quaint old city of Stratford-on-Avon, in Warwickshire. My father, the son of one of the old English yeomen, who had early in life displayed a taste for letters, was educated by Squire Lucy, and as he grew up was appointed librarian to the poet Shakespeare's old house. How well I recollect the quaint old place with its mouldering timbers and crumbling walls (*see illustration, page 9*). Many and many a day have I helped my dear father to shew round the groups of visitors who found their way to the shrine of the immortal bard.

"Amongst them were people of all nations, and many of our American cousins were deeply affected, giving themselves up to rhapsody, and breaking out into exclamations of delight on beholding the room in which the Poet was born (*see illustration, page 10*). Early as a child I went to school, and there met your Aunt Amy who became my fast friend and companion. Amy Stanley, whose home was in Redditch, came to board with my schoolmistress her grandmother, and from the time we first met we became fast friends. As we both grew older and left school our friendship did not cease, and often she came to stay with me, and on one occasion your father then a young man of twenty-two years old came with her and resided for some days with his grandmother. It was



Shakespeare's House, and Street in Stratford-on-Avon.



The Room Shakespeare was born in.

quite a case of love at first sight, and before his stay was over he had asked me to be his wife. Ah, well do I recollect our walks through the fields by the gentle river Avon, the grand old parish church before us, the reflection of its beautiful spire cast across the water (*see illustration on cover*), the green fields sloping to the water's edge, and the distant lowing of the cattle.

"We were married in the parish church, and never shall I forget that day.

"The sun was streaming through the clear storey windows and casting bright rays over pillar and pulpit, and a proud and happy girl was I, as leaning on your father's arm I passed through the porch and along the worn stone pathway shadowed with its avenue of elms, catching a glimpse of the silvery Avon with the white swans floating on its bosom. (*See illustration, page 13*).

"After partaking of a hearty breakfast and bidding a sorrowful farewell to my dear father and mother and many friends, I got up by your father's side into the spring-cart, which had been lent to him by his employers at Redditch, and we set off on our eventful drive to our new home. Quickly sped the horse and we passed through Shottery, where is still the picturesque cottage in which Ann Hathaway, Shakespeare's wife, was born (*see illustration, page 14*); over Red Hill with its numerous fox coverts, the spring tints on the trees softening and adding charms to the landscape, then through the quiet town of Alcester, where the farmers standing stolidly about in the market place nodded a cheerful greeting to your father, who was well known to them.

"On through Coughton, the fine old court looking not a whit the worse for time's decay; what secrets its old walls could tell of the time when Guy Fawkes hid within its walls! Then quickly passing through the

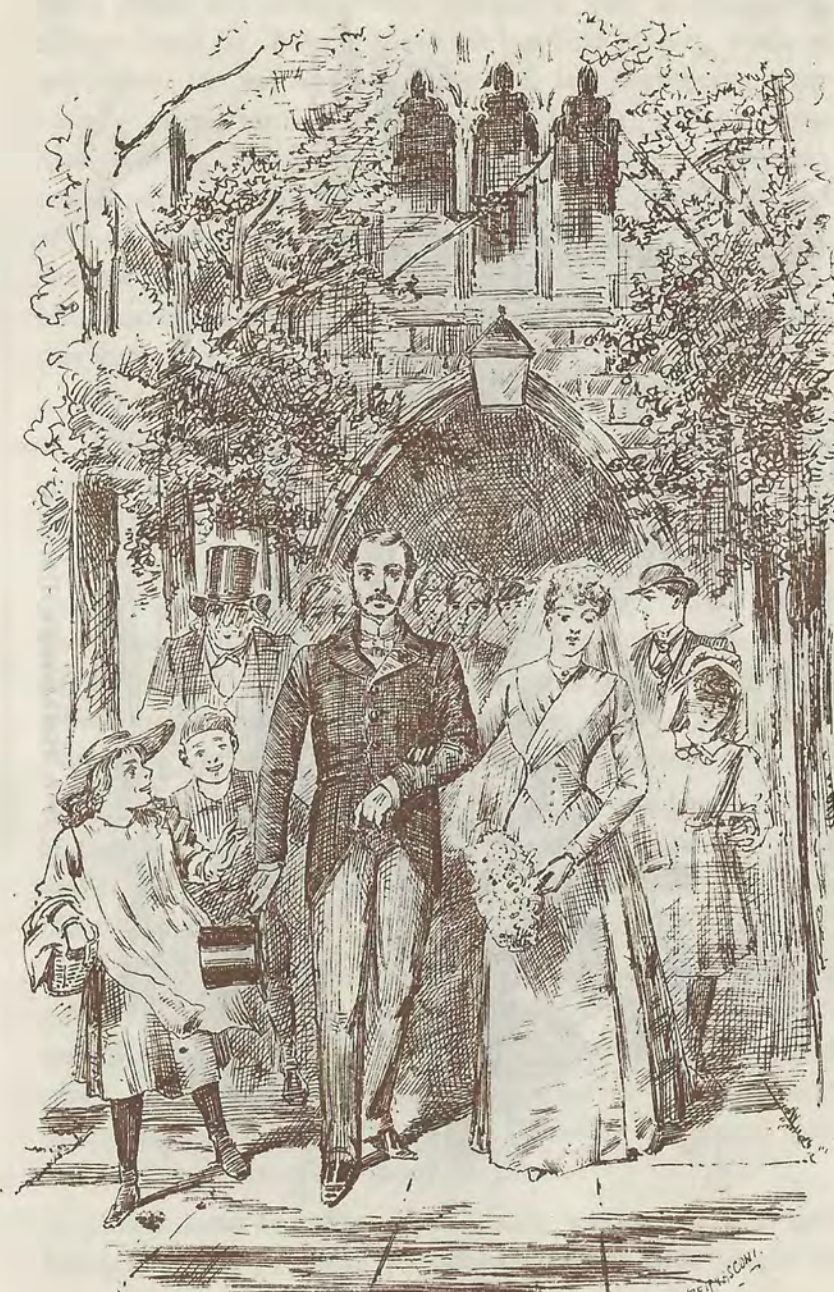
village of Studley and leaving the sloping fields of Ipsley to the right, with Lord Moon's moat, the haunt of the will o' the wisp, looking weird in the shimmering light, we arrived in the softened twilight at the outskirts of Redditch, where I was destined to pass so many peaceful days. Well do I remember my mingled feelings as we sped merrily through Alcester Street and across the Market Place, down the Unicorn Hill to my new abode, where I found your dear father had arranged a comfortable home for me."

CHAPTER II.

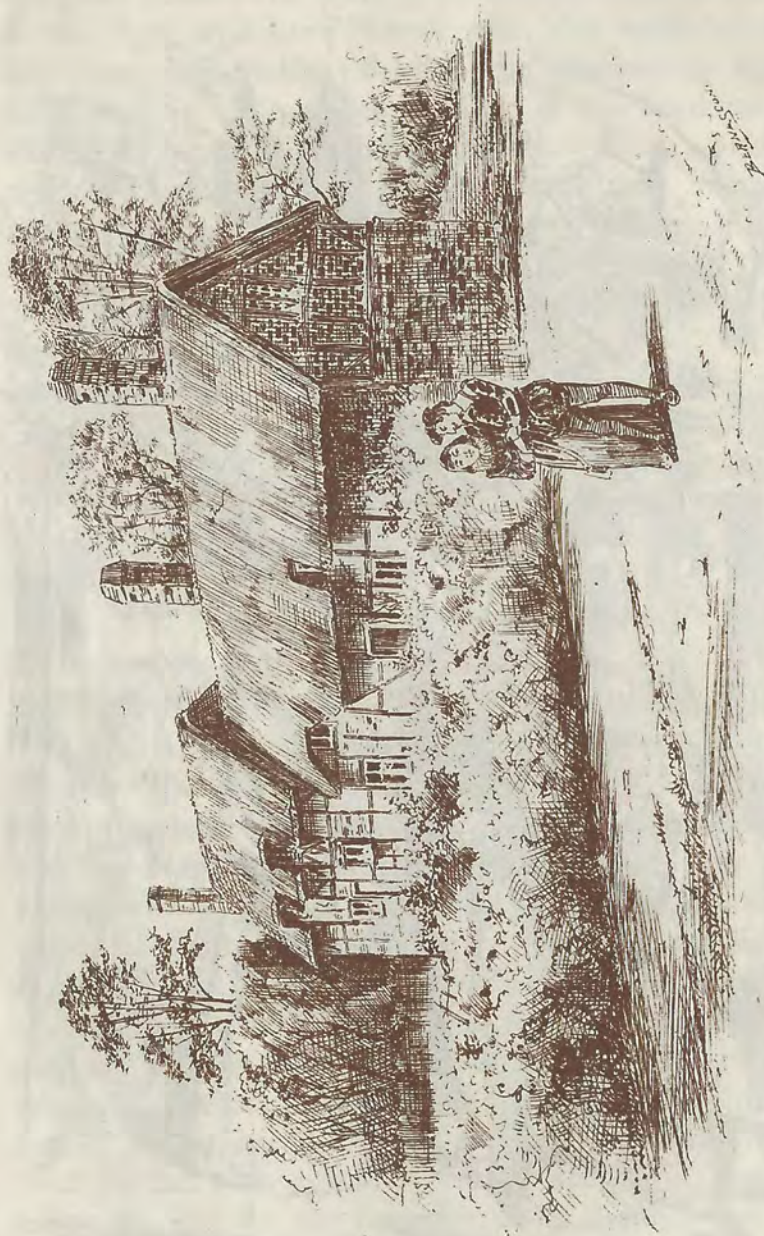
"**Y**OUR father, Mary, held a responsible position as foreman in the employ of Messrs. William Bartleet and Sons, of the Abbey Mills, who were very large manufacturers of Needles and Sewing Machine Needles, and were also celebrated for their Fish Hooks, Fishing Tackle and Fishing Rods, besides other Goods in which you would not be interested, and before I give you, as I promised, the History of a Needle I should like to tell you something about the ancient and well known firm where I first learnt how such a useful thing as a perfect needle could be produced out of a simple coil of wire.

"So far back as A.D. 1750, this firm was in existence, and for the integrity of its dealings and the superior quality of its goods, it has always been celebrated.

"The various members of the firm have taken a



The Wedding:
Coming down the Avenue from Stratford-on-Avon Church.



Ann Hathaway's Cottage.

leading part in every philanthropic and public movement from the time when Redditch was a straggling village until it has become a bustling town, and at one time in its history three of its members were county magistrates. The present senior of the firm, Mr. Robert Smith Bartleet, is a county magistrate and deputy-lieutenant, and when the Redditch company of rifle volunteers was started, he was unanimously chosen captain. Now I hear that his eldest son, Mr. Harold Bartleet, is a major in the battalion of which this company forms a part.

“Mr. R. S. Bartleet has lately presented to the town of Redditch a very handsome fountain, which has been erected in the Church Green enclosure (*see illustration, page 17*). On all public occasions this fountain (which was modelled by Mr. Wills, the eminent sculptor, and cast by the celebrated Coalbrook Dale Company,) plays, and the visitors who come to the town much admire its beautiful proportions and its centre figure which represents nature supplying the animal and vegetable world with its greatest want, pure water.

“Several years ago Mr. Bartleet excavated part of the ancient Abbey of Bordesley, and some portions of it were formed into a garden at his residence (*see illustration, page 18*).

“But now for the History of a Needle and how a perfect one is made at the present time. You will recollect that in the book of Genesis we are informed that Adam and Eve ‘sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.’ It is therefore supposed that the first needles were made of thorns.

“It is recorded that Tubal Cain worked in iron and brass, and it is possible that needles were next made of

these metals. Harriet Martineau states that in Dr. Abbot's museum at Cairo there is a wooden needle of extremely old make, together with a piece of sewing taken out of the tomb of an Egyptian lady. At an exhibition held in Dublin there was a collection of bone and bronze needles found in Ireland and Denmark. The Laplanders sometimes honoured their most industrious women by burying their needles with them.

"In England, formerly, the upper classes used gold and silver needles and some estates were held by the annual payment of one or two of these costly articles. From *Speed's Chronicles* we learn that Henry V., when Prince of Wales, was a student at Queen's College, Cambridge, and that 'he came into his father's presence in a strange disguise, being in a garment of blue satin wrought full of eyelet holes, and at every eyelet the needle left hanging by the silk it was wrought with.' The habit of the scholar was so very different from that of a soldier in those days that nothing could better allay the king's suspicions than this silent declaration of attachment to literature and renunciation of the sword.

"There are at this day Indian women who sew with needles of porcupine quill and thread made of sinews of the deer.

"The Chinese have made steel needles from a remote period. I have seen some good needles that were made in that Empire.

"The earliest record of needle-making in London is in the year 1545, during the reign of Henry VIII., and it is supposed that this useful branch of industry was introduced by a Moor from Spain.

"Stowe, in his chronicles, states that when the first Queen Mary reigned, needles were sold in Cheapside and



Fountain presented to the town of Redditch
by Mr. R. S. Bartleet.



Sketches in Mr. R. S. Bartleet's
Abbey Garden.

some other busy streets of London, and at that time they were made by a Spanish negro, who refused to disclose the secrets of his art.

"From an old volume we learn that needles were for the first time made at Long Crendon in 1650, whence the trade was taken to Redditch and its district.

"The Restoration of King Charles II. gave an impetus to the needle trade; the court and people never dressing more extravagantly than during his reign, and the King granted a magnificent coat of arms to the needle makers.

"In Queen Anne's time the needle seems to have fallen comparatively into disuse. We find a writer in the *Spectator* commenting on the idleness of the ladies of that time, proposing certain rules to amend it.

"1st, That no maid shall be allowed to receive the addresses of her first lover but in a suit of her own embroidery.

"2nd, That before every fresh domestic she shall appear in a fresh stomacher.

"3rd, That no one be married till she have all the domestic linen ready and a mantle for the baby ready stitched.

"Having given you, darling, a slight historical account of the early history of a needle, I will now do as I have promised—take you by description over the dear old "Abbey Mills," in which I spent several happy and profitable years.

"The Abbey Mills stand at the top of Prospect Hill, Redditch, the upper windows commanding lovely views of the beautiful neighbourhood around. Part of the building is very old, but everything that modern art or science can effect has been done to make the workrooms comfortable and healthy and whilst I was there all its in-

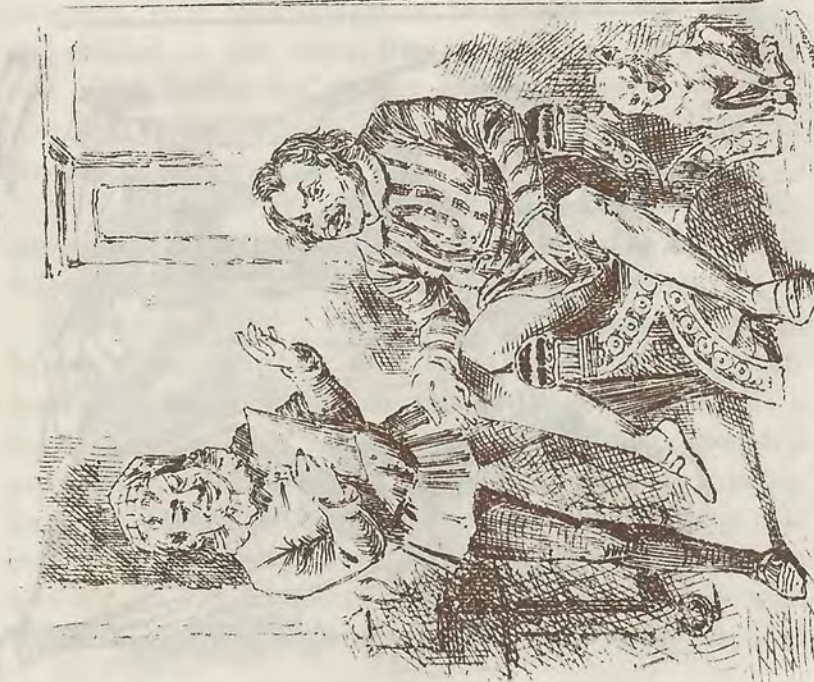
mates were remarkably free from sickness. Order and regularity reigns supreme and although the greatest discipline is maintained all the hands were cheerful and happy and Messrs. Wm. Bartleet and Sons' needles and other manufactures being so well known and appreciated in all the markets of the world, orders came in continuously and kept us in constant employment. But now I will describe to you the modern process for the manufacture of needles.

CHAPTER III.

AS I have already mentioned, needles are made out of a coil of steel wire. My masters were very particular to use only the most perfect brands of Sheffield steel, noted for their strength and elasticity. Under the old system these coils were sent in varying gauges—1, 2, 3, and 4, numbered thus by the Sheffield wire-drawers; but finding that this did not insure sufficient accuracy, Messrs. Bartleet have introduced a decimal standard of their own, by which the wire is gauged into half-a-thousandth part of an inch, insuring a perfect regularity in the various sizes of needles.

“The wire is first cut into lengths, each length to make two needles. To rub these lengths straight, as each piece partakes of the curvature of the ring it was cut from, two iron rings are filled with them and the whole are put into a furnace until nearly red-hot.

SHAKESPEARE ON SEWING.



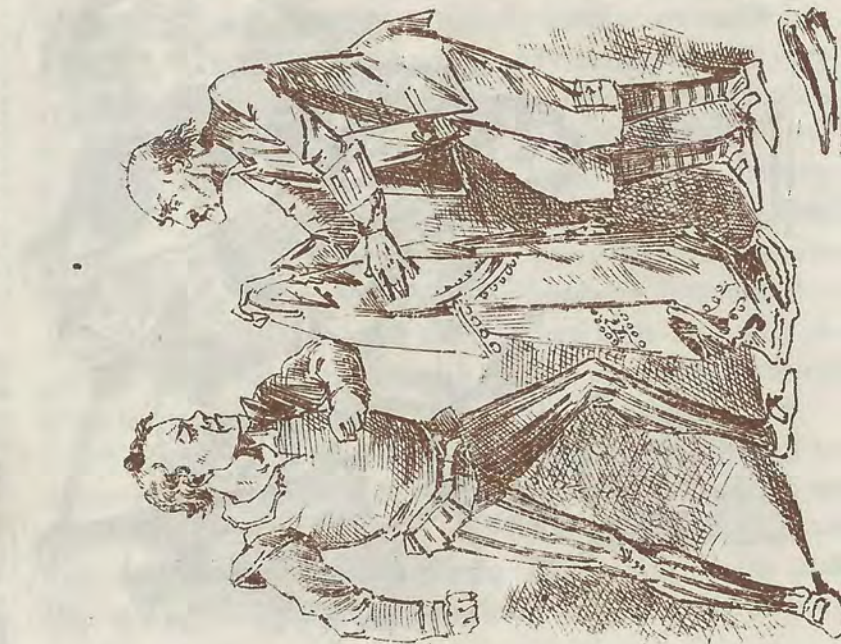
SPEED.—Item, She can Sew.
LAUNCE.—That's as much as to say, can she so?

Two Gentlemen of Verona.—Act III. Sc. I.



VALERIA.—Come, lay aside your Stitchery.

Coriolanus.—Act I. Sc. III.



TAILOR. — But how did you desire it should be made?
GRUMIO. — Marry, sir, with needle and thread.

Taming of the Shrew,
Act IV. Sc. III.



BAPTISTA. — Bianca, stand aside; poor girl! she weeps;
Go ply the needle; meddle not with her.

Taming of the Shrew,
Act II. Sc. I.

They are then taken out by means of a large pair of tongs, placed on an iron table, and the straightening is performed by means of a long flat iron instrument called a rubbing knife. One of the knives is furnished with a couple of slits into which the rings are inserted, the other knife is put into the space between the two rings, and in either case the workman rubs the wires backwards and forwards, by which action they are made to roll over each other, and the effect of rubbing one against the other is to make them straight and reduce the bulk about one-half.

“The next process is the pointing at both ends of the lengths, and in former days when the needles were pointed by hand at the Abbey Mills, this process greatly shortened the lives of the workmen. Many attempts were made by Messrs. Bartleet and Sons to prevent the dust entering into the lungs of the workmen; they were, however, most independent as they earned high wages, and refused to use them, the pointer’s impression being that if he made use of any contrivance which would lengthen his life it would at the same time reduce the amount of his wages.

“On the old system seven or eight years were sufficient to terminate their existence, owing to the deadly influence of the dust produced by the grindstones.

“The beautiful automatic pointing machinery which Messrs. Wm. Bartleet and Sons introduced into their works has entirely altered this phase of the work; a rapidly rotating fan draws away all the dust through a pipe into a water chamber, instead of, as before, passing into the lungs of the workman and shortening his existence. I shall never forget a true story which was told me by my old doctor about one of his patients who was a hand needle-pointer. The man used often to

complain that he had a hard ball of something in his windpipe, which rose and fell between his chest and throat. The old doctor used to laugh, and tell him it was all nonsense, but the man still persisted it was there, and asked the doctor at his death to examine him. After the poor fellow died a post mortem examination was made with the result that a solid mass of steel and stone dust of the size of a blackbird's egg was found, as he had predicted, in his windpipe; the lungs also were so encrusted with steel that a knife would scarcely pierce them. What a blessing, then, to the busy workers at the Abbey Mills when the deadly process was done away with, and in its stead a healthy and still remunerative process substituted.

"The wires being pointed at both ends, after several minor yet most essential processes, receive by means of a stamp, worked either by hand or machine, two impressions for the eyes in the centre of the wire. I need hardly tell you that owing to the fineness of the wire—a current size being only twenty-nine thousandths of an inch in diameter—this process requires the most skilled mechanics and perfect machinery.

"Next comes the 'eyeing,' or piercing of the two impressions for the eyes in the centre of the wire, which is done by girls, with steam or hand presses, and requires equal skill as the stamping.

"To file off the burr produced by the stamp and to round the top of the heads, a most ingenious device is adopted. A child takes two wires in one hand and runs a wire through each of the double needle's eyes. The appearance of the wires thus spitted somewhat resembles a small tooth-comb. The burrs are now removed by means of a flat file or grindstone, commonly called a

SHAKESPEARE ON SEWING.



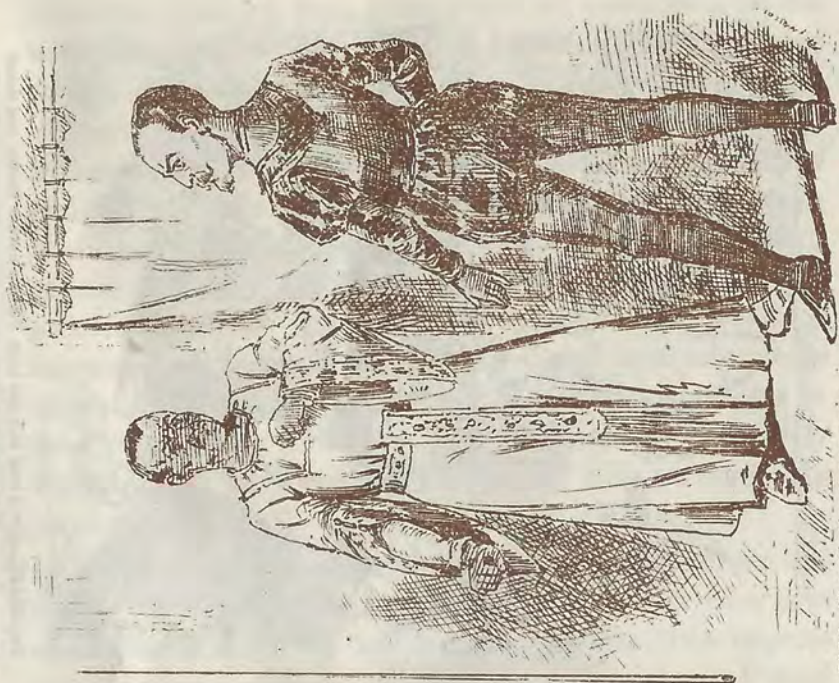
VALERIA.—How do you both? You are manifest housekeepers. What are you sewing here. Coriolanus.—Act I. Sc. III.



FALSTAFF.—Ere I lead this life long, I'll sew nether stocks, and mend them, and foot them too. Henry IV.—Act II. Sc. IV.



OPHELIA.—My lord, as I was sewing in my closet.
Hamlet.—Act II. Sc. I.



IAGO.—Nay, that's not your way.
OTHELLO.—Hang her! I do but say what she is.—So delicate with her needle
Othello.—Act IV. Sc. I.

filing machine; the burr having been removed from one side, the needles are turned over and the other side filed.

“The spit of needles is next placed in a kind of hand-vice, technically called “clams,” by which the double needles are broken into two parts and the heads of the needles are filed or ground round, and they are then taken off the spits, each forming a single needle.

“I need hardly tell you that whereas a perfect needle has a hard and elastic temper, the needles in their present state are softer than the wire out of which they were made; therefore, after the needles have been burnished in the eyes by a process I will describe later on, they are hardened by the following method, which requires the most skilled labour and perfect regularity:—the needles are placed on pans, put into an oven, and when red-hot are suddenly slid into a cauldron of oil. This rapid cooling of the steel makes it as brittle as a piece of glass. The needles will now break almost with a touch, indeed in this condition they would be as useless as in the soft state. To reduce them to a perfect state of elasticity their temperature has to be raised to about 600 degrees and by allowing them to cool gradually the required degree of elasticity is given. During the process of hardening the heat of the fire makes many of the needles crooked, and the crooked needles have to be picked out and straightened by a small hammer, one at a time, on an anvil. The heads are afterwards softened by heat for the burnishing process. The next process, that of scouring the needles bright, takes about a week. The needles are gathered together, mixed with oil, soft-soap and emery powder, wrapped in loose canvas and placed in a kind of mangle, worked by mill power. They are often taken out, washed, and redressed. The last time of all, a certain composition is mixed with them which greatly

improves the surface ; this done, the needles are washed in hot water and dried in sawdust.

“The needles afterwards go through several other minor but essentially necessary processes.

“The points, then, which have become slightly deadened in passing through the various processes, are set sharp by a small revolving grindstone. Another burnishing of the eyes is now given by the following process :—the eyes are threaded on roughened steel wires, each end of the wire is then fixed on a frame which is made to travel backwards and forwards at a rapid rate, causing immense friction in the inside of the eyes and smoothing them effectually. The next process is that of polishing the needle to the greatest possible pitch of perfection, which is performed on a rapidly rotating wheel covered with prepared leather. The needles are made to pass many times over the leather and emerge polished as smooth as it is possible to bring the surface of steel.

“They are now counted and stuck by expert women into the cloth and wrapped in their well-known papers and labelled for every market of the world.

“And now, my dear Mary, you know how a needle is made out of a simple coil of wire until it becomes the beautiful, highly polished article which all women who are lucky enough to hit on a really good make of needles prize so highly.”

Mary thanks her mother for the tale she has so often been longing to hear, and widely opening her blue eyes, says :

“But mother, darling, when I go in the shops I see so many makes of needles for sale, do tell me whose needles I should ask for ? ”

“Well, my dear child,” said her mother, “I have tried nearly every make, and can truly say for elastic



The Nightmare.

Bartleet's 'ARCHER' Brand, rescues Mary from the Dragon, 'Bad Needles.'

EIGO NEEDLE

The New
EASY
THREADING
Needle

PACKET OF 25 NEEDLES



The Old
System

LAWKS A MERGY!
This is the first time for TEN YEARS
I have been able to thread my Needle.

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EIGO NEEDLES. PENNY PACKET

TO THREAD THE NEEDLE

SLIDE THE THREAD ALONG
THE THINNEST SIDE OF THE
TOWER EYE, PULLING IT
SLIGHTLY INWARDS, WHEN
THE NEEDLE THREADS ITSELF,
THEN PASS THE THREAD INTO
THE TOP EYE, WHICH IS
PERFECTLY POLISHED AND
WILL NOT CUT THE THREAD
IT IS IMPOSSIBLE
FOR THE THREAD TO BE
PULLED OUT IN USE.

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TESTED QUALITY

ONE PENNY
W. BARTLEET & SONS
REDDITCH.

temper, smoothness of eye, taper of point, and beautiful finish my husband's old masters, W. Bartleet and Sons' 'Archer Brand,' (see illustrations, page 30) which you can buy in penny packets, or in larger packets of 25 needles, are the very best. When you get older in life you will probably want to use sewing machine needles, and you will find W. Bartleet and Sons' 'Archer Brand' of these also are always to be depended upon. In fact, my dear child, for nearly a century-and-a-half W. Bartleet and Sons' needles have been celebrated, and they have obtained fifteen gold and prize medals for excellence at all the leading exhibitions; including two gold medals, Paris, 1889; gold medal, Melbourne, 1888, etc."

"When you get old or should you find your eyesight become defective, you will be able to buy Messrs. William Bartleet and Sons' 'Eigo' Self-threading needles, which you can thread with your eyes shut (see illustrations, page 30). If you want to give to your friends any pretty, useful, and inexpensive presents ask in the shops for Wm. Bartleet and Sons' newest needle cases which contain needles of all kinds for use in a family."

"Now good night, darling, and if you do dream about needles be sure you dream about Wm. Bartleet and Sons' 'Archer Brand.'"





Shakespeare and his Wife in their Garden at Stratford-on-Avon.



Shakespeare's Monument
in
Stratford-on-Avon Church.

JOHN PATON, SON & CO.,

ALLOA, SCOTLAND;

AND

Flinder's Lane, MELBOURNE;

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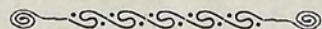
Stephen's Place, ADELAIDE.

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