

L A C E.

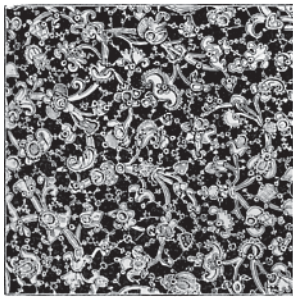


FIG. 1.—ROSE-POINT, NEEDLE-POINT LACE. VENETIAN, 17TH CENTURY.

A GOOD many books have been written about lace and the incidents of its history and manufacture. Some are considerable in size, and some comparatively small. The illustrations are often numerous and attractive-looking; they are generally successful in showing the picturesque appearance of lace. It is to be feared, however, that amateurs rely to too great an extent upon them. The knowledge picked up from the study of such books cannot, on the face of it, result in a real acquaintanceship with the materials used, or with the way in which they are used. On this account we propose to say a few words on the importance of studying actual specimens—that is, if a real knowledge of methods of lace-making be desired.

Everything has its proper use, and the more intimately acquainted a wearer of lace becomes with the facts concerning its production, the more will she be influenced to put lace to its proper use. She will be able to understand how discordances arise when machine and hand-made laces are mixed in the adornment of a *coiffure* or a *fichu*; or when, say, needle-point

lace is mixed with pillow-made lace in the ornamentation of a *polonoise* or *corsage*. She will not be at the mercy of the vendor of laces, who blandly declares that such and such a specimen is a splendid "Point de Malines," or such a one is a rare piece of "Point de Neige." She will learn to be wary of full-sounding, well-rounded forms of lace nomenclature. She will

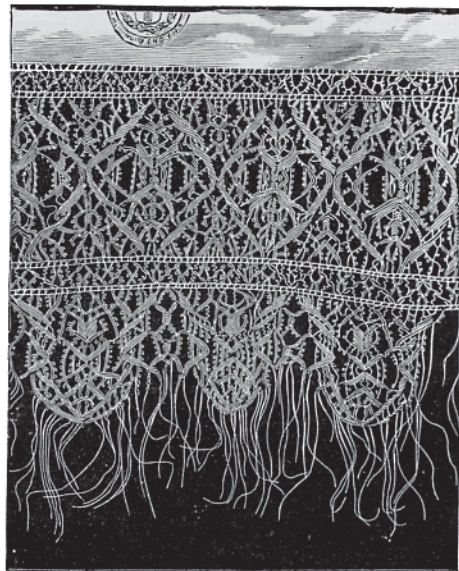


FIG. 2.—MACRAMÉ OR PUNT A GROPPA TWISTED THREAD LACE. ITALIAN.

reduce the mystification of varieties of laces to some simple matter-of-fact classification. Arrived at this stage of knowledge, she finds

herself privileged to turn her attention to the historical and romantic side of the question, and to learn how to soften her unimpeachable utterances upon the twisting or looping of threads with anecdotes of the convents and churches of Italy and Spain, of the Court of Louis XIV., with appropriate references to portraits by Holbein, by Franz Hals, by Vandyck, or with happy reminiscences of delicate sculp-

tured tracery on rarely mentioned ancestral tombs, to say nothing of apt quotations from the gentle-minded poets who have extolled the art of fairy-like works inherited from Arachne.

Unfortunately, it is frequently the rule to reverse this order of things, and glib talk about the designs of Vinciolo, the intrigues of Colbert in the establishment of the great Alençon lace manufactory, the successful feats of smuggling lengths of lace wound round a Dutch boer's body, or packed inside the cranium of some plaster of Paris Venus, passes for knowledge about lace.

To one who wishes to know certain distinguishing features of lace, a magnifying-glass of pretty high power is necessary. As a preliminary practice in the use of the glass, it will be well to try and trace the course of a single thread in a piece of work, and to find out by this means if the thread be merely twisted and plaited, or if it be looped up, twisted, looped up again, and so on. In suggesting what may seem to be a rather tedious process, a caution is necessary against the insidious fascination of tracing the course of a single thread in a complex weaving, which so infatuated some unfortunate creature as to drive him or her into a condition of melancholy, because the end of the thread could never be discovered.

Twisted or plaited threads are a chief feature of pillow-made lace; recurrent loopings-up, twistings and loopings-up, &c., of needle-point lace. But ladies accustomed to use their

needles would instantly find out what sort of stitch is employed in such a work, as, say, the thick white filling-in of flowers and stems in a piece of Venetian point lace. And having once fixed a fact of this kind in their minds, the



Fig. 3.—TAPE LACE, WITH FILLINGS-IN OF NEEDLE-POINT WORK. ITALIAN, 17TH CENTURY.

detection of points of difference between pillow and needle-point laces would soon become a matter of certainty. The next step to be taken might be to examine under the glass a piece of pillow-made lace and a piece of machine-made lace. In the latter would be discovered, as a rule, a wiry, hard regularity of appearance, very unlike the soft lay of the threads intertwined on the pillow. From this stage one might proceed to studying the sorts of ground net-works, or, as they are technically known, the *réseau*. Here would be found two kinds of workmanship, the one resembling the twistings and plaitings, the other the loopings-up and twistings already mentioned as characteristics of the two broad classes of lace. Varieties in grounds arise from the use of one, two, three, four, or more threads, looped-up or plaited to form a single mesh of the groundwork. Each variety belongs to a certain section of lace. Thus the mesh in the needle-point lace, known as "point d'Alençon," is composed of a series of single-thread loops, cast on to one another, and kept in position by lines of thread running transversely to the loops; in fine Venetian laces, with a *réseau*—which, by the way, are rare—the *réseau* is made in the same way, but the loops of the meshes are arranged perpendicularly to the length of the piece of lace,

whilst in point d'Alençon they are horizontal—that is, parallel to the length of the piece. In pillow lace one finds many fanciful varieties of twistings to form the *réseau*. Lille lace has the simplest form of *réseau*. The most elaborate *réseaux* are those belonging to the class of Valenciennes laces, which is called “fausses Valenciennes” in contradistinction to that of the “vrais Valenciennes;” though amongst the buyers and sellers of lace these works are as often as not called Mechlin laces. Mechlin, however, has a perfectly distinctive *réseau*, and so has Brussels. The relationship existing between these finer laces and the coarse provincial laces may easily be traced. As soon as it is apparent that laces have a rational development to be traced more easily than those of various natural growths, the interest in acquiring definite knowledge on the subject increases.

Of the four specimens selected to illustrate this paper, two are of kinds of lace which are often worked successfully at the present day. Fig. 2, of twisted thick threads (cord may be used with equally good effect), passes under the name of “Macramé work;” an earlier name dating from the sixteenth century is *punt a groppo*. Effective mantelpiece borders and

fringes may be made in this manner. Although the name implies an Italian origin for this lace, the twisting of coarse threads in this fashion was as likely as not to have been known to the earliest fine art practisers of whom we have any history. Fringed cloths of the

Egyptians were ornamented in the manner of this *punt a groppo*, though not in the same pattern. The plaited fibres of South American and African workmanship are analogous to the *punt a groppo*. Fig. 1 is a reduced copy of some delicate Venetian rose-point lace—a needle-point lace which was developed from handsome, flat, needle-made lace, figured in pattern books of the sixteenth century under names such as *punt in aria*, *punto tagliato a foliami*. Fig. 3 is a mixed lace—

Italian, seventeenth century. The main stem is a woven tape, whilst the filled-in ornaments are worked with a needle. This is a lace which is still made, and in the execution of which there are no such subtle difficulties to overcome as would be found in the production of such a lace as that of Fig. 2. Fig. 4 is a piece of Flemish pillow lace, with a groundwork of two sorts of devices in the plaiting of the threads.

These few remarks on characteristics of certain laces may, it is hoped, sufficiently interest the readers of them to cause them to adopt the use of a magnifying-glass as a means of ready detection between needle-point and pillow-made lace. Engravings of lace specimens are useful to the student of design in lace.

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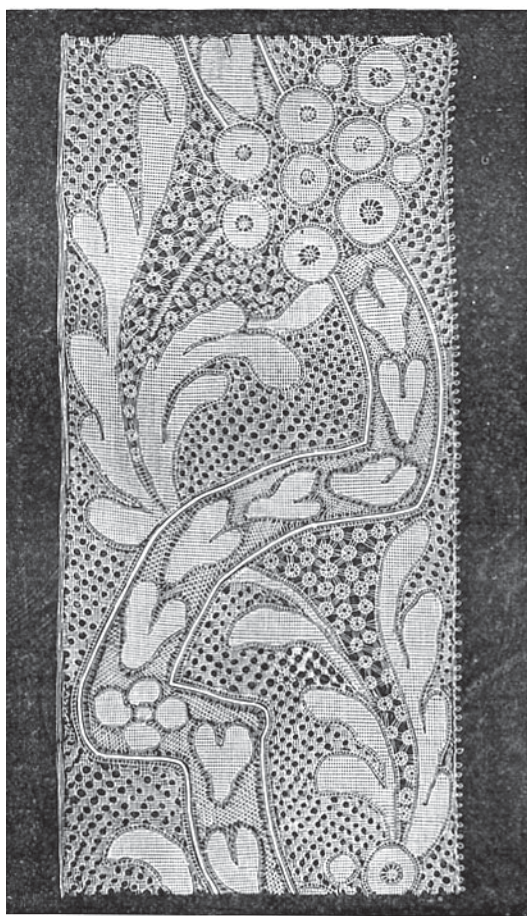


FIG. 4.—FLEMISH PILLOW LACE. 18TH CENTURY.

Design, however, is an important branch in the general study of the subject. Its study involves more time than the acquirement of skill to distinguish the comparatively few kinds of workmanship employed in the production of lace.