

DESIGN FOR "FILET" FROM VINCILO'S "SINGULIERS ET NOUVEAUX
POURTRAICTS," PARIS, 1588¹

A LACE SALE AT THE HÔTEL DROUOT,
IN PARIS, IN THE YEAR 1882

BY MARIAN HAGUE

WOULD some of our lace collectors of the present day be interested by an account of a sale in the year 1882 of the laces of Madame Blanc, the widow of the "fermier des jeux" at Monte Carlo? The sale took place at the Hôtel Drouot in Paris, famous for its art auctions, and was one of a series at which the belongings of this rather picturesque personage were sold. She had what was considered then an almost fabulous fortune—about sixteen million dollars. Her passion for accumulating not only laces but paintings, furniture, and particularly jewels, was so great that in spite of her wealth she was always cramped for funds and would buy on long terms of credit.

She was very generous and charitable, as though to take the curse off the source of her wealth, and it was said that she never dismissed a servant, so that when she died there were twenty-six in her establishment, some of whom were practically pensioners.

She had filled her house to overflowing with the many objects of all kinds which she incessantly bought, so that for several years she had used another house simply for storage.

After her death her heirs took what they wanted and the rest was sold.

¹ Omitted in the Wolfe reprint of London, 1591. See p. 8.

The following paragraphs are from the volume on the Hôtel Drouot by Paul Eudel.¹

“The sales of Madame Blanc continue at intervals of a fortnight. The princesses of high finance and those by right of birth or conquest come to them assiduously.

Marie Antoinette certainly had no more jewels. Madame Campan speaks, as of a great extravagance of Louis XVI, of the purchase of a set of rubies and diamonds with two bracelets for which two hundred thousand francs were paid, and of a pair of diamond cluster earrings bought in 1774 for three hundred and sixty thousand francs, which the Queen often wore. Madame Blanc had jewels worth millions—only she never wore them.

The fifth sale was devoted to the laces, and the amiable auctioneer operated before an audience which included besides the regular habitués, who followed the proceedings with interest, many of the great dressmakers, a few ‘précieuses,’ and some beautiful demi-mondaines.

Lace is the poetry of woman. It lives with her, accompanying the beating of her heart, half revealing, half concealing her charms. It always has, when one touches it, a fragrance of femininity which intoxicates us. Lace gives wings to dress—whether it peeps out at the wrists, flutters on the corsage, ripples around the neck, or billows on majestic trains. Have you seen it come from the deft fingers of the lace-makers as they produce the feathery sprays, with forms like snowflakes or radiating pine needles, while the bobbins fly, click against each other, and seem to quarrel?

They were very beautiful and as though inspired by fairies—the laces of Madame Blanc. Though seemingly fragile as cobwebs, they have survived all the beauties who wore them—triumphant favorites or witty marquises who for many years have slept their last sleep.

The greater number of these ethereal fabrics had received their titles of nobility at Chantilly Cluny, and Alençon. The ancient Venetian needle-point had all possible success. A flounce of remarkable fineness, 23 centimetres wide and four metres long, was knocked down at 8050 francs (\$1610.00). Had it served to enhance the beauty of one of the lovely

¹ Paris, 1882, p. 87.

patricians of the Foscari or Contarini palaces? Another flounce with a design of flowers among branches of foliage, fifteen centimetres wide and three metres and a half long, 2250 francs (\$450.00). A third piece with wonderful raised work, 3060 francs (\$612.00); a fourth, rose point, thirty centimetres wide, 5580 francs (\$1116.00). Another with a scrolling of foliage on a réseau ground, 3660 francs (\$732.00); still another with a scattering of flowers, fifty centimetres wide and two metres and three quarters long, 2620 francs (\$524.00). Finally the last, with flowers and great palms, sixty centimetres wide and three metres long, 5005 francs (\$1001.00).

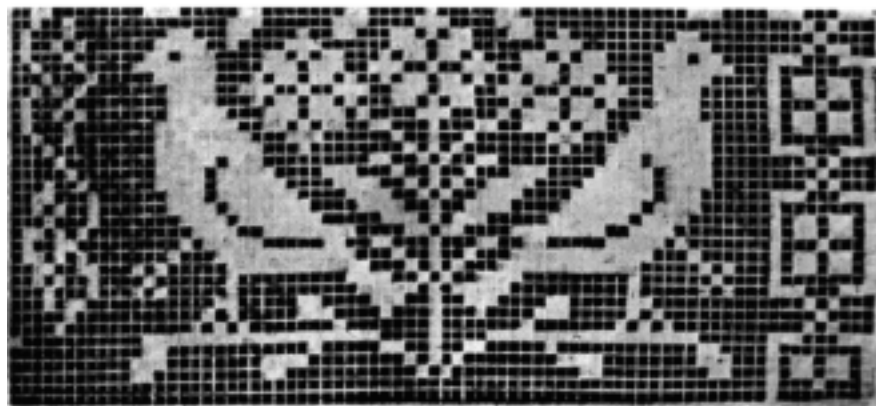
Without doubt, the two flounces and this garniture for a corsage, of wonderful workmanship, for 11,600 francs (\$2320.00), had been worn by some Dogaressa appearing in all her splendor on her balcony above the Grand Canal at the fête of the Bucentaur.

Then followed old points d'Angleterre which had perhaps covered the tremorous shoulders of the princesses of the court of Queen Anne; a flounce of ancient guipure of 65 centimetres in width, for 1000 francs (\$200.00), and a dress with a ground of palm leaves, sprays of roses and foliage, very much disputed, sold for 1460 francs (\$292.00). A dress garniture of Alençon, precious souvenir of French handicraft, was bid up to 3500 francs (\$700.00).

There was a pretty total of 160,000 francs (\$32,000.00). My charming readers will perhaps ask me the names of the lucky buyers. I do not know—but I can tell them that in past times Queen Elizabeth had fully a thousand dresses trimmed with lace, and that more than six hundred metres of lace were necessary to garnish the night ruffles of Charles First."

Of course it is a difficult matter to compare prices without having seen the pieces under discussion, but, while the prices quoted above seem to have been considered good at the time of the sale, as there is no mention of the buyers having secured great bargains, it is safe to say that such laces would be worth a third to a half more at the present day. At the Beer sale in Paris in 1917, the prices were thought very low by the experts. The flounce of rose point, a metre and a half long and 17 centimetres wide, which was illustrated in the BULLETIN of December, 1917, brought \$2160.00, and other pieces sold for \$1200.00, \$800.00, \$600.00, etc.

A flounce of Flemish lace of the first quarter of the eighteenth century was sold at auction in New York a short time ago and brought \$500.00. Laces seem to bring rather better prices at sales in France or England than in this country.



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