

Lace at the Metropolitan Museum

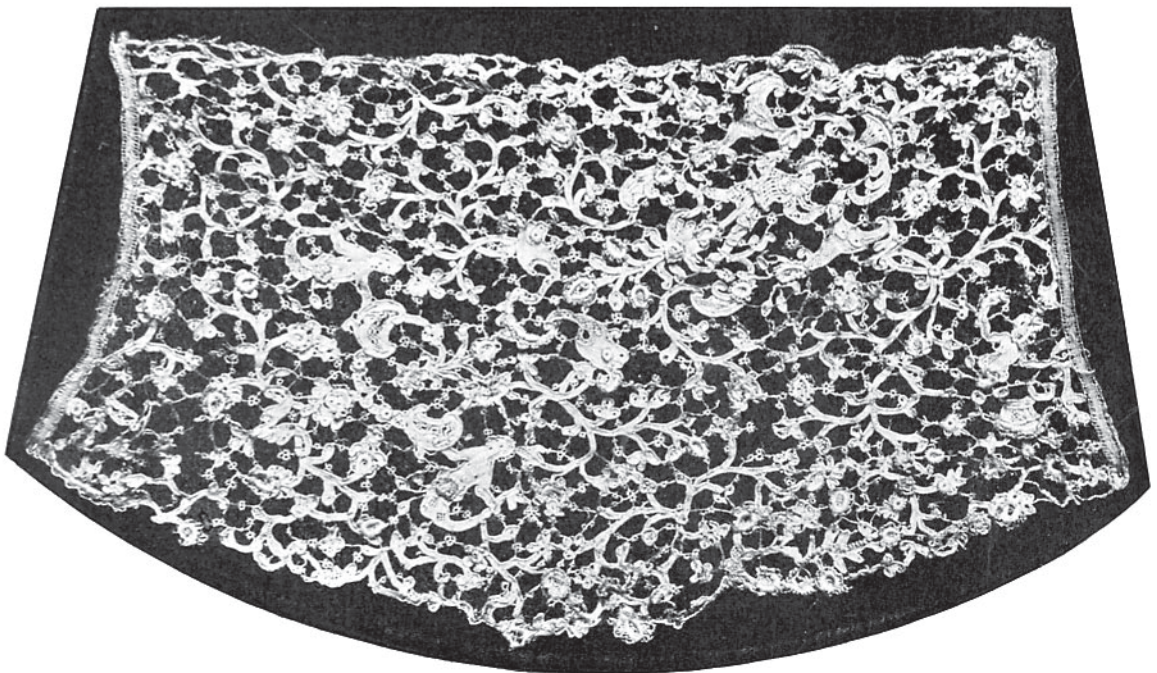
THE LACE COLLECTION AT THE
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
BY EVA LOVETT
SECOND NOTICE

AFTER the invention of lace proper, this new filmy, airy fabric, manufactured without any foundation whatever, took on an entirely different character. The first "Punto in Aria" was made, it is thought, about the close of the fifteenth century. Like every other invention, it was a growth out of all that had preceded it. The gradual lightening of the heavy embroidery, popular for hundreds of years, by cutting out bits of the material upon which it was worked had passed to that stage when nearly the whole stuff could be cut away and an elaborate pattern still worked on the few threads that were left. Some of the magnificent Reticella laces of early Venetian days, laces worked specially for brides of noble houses, and which were made after this method, show to what an extent such work was carried. By the closest examination we cannot discover the threads of the original material. To dispense with it altogether may not seem a great matter to us, but it must have appeared a miracle to the woman who first found she could make "point in the air" without any guiding material. The name they gave it proved the wonder of this new lace.

In a very short time, a swifter method of making

"point in the air" was invented. "Bobbin lace" or "pillow lace," descriptive names of this new method, soon came in, and patterns grew more and more complicated because of the ease with which they were done. An elaborate pattern took no more work or time than a plain filling stitch. It took more skill, care and attention, but there were thousands of skilled lace-workers, already manufacturing lace with the needle, who hastened to adopt these easier methods. Much lace continued to be made with the needle, and many laces were a combination of the methods, work with the needle being put upon the flat surface of the pillow or bobbin laces for their further adornment. But lace still continued an expensive trimming. Hands, and skilful hands, were needed in its manufacture, whether these hands held a needle, or plied a bobbin and stuck pins in a pillow. The wearing of lace continued to be confined to the wealthy, and the higher the rank of the wearer the more elegant were his laces. Some of these early Venetian laces are marvels of beauty. The Metropolitan Museum exhibit contains some delightful examples of these early Venetian points.

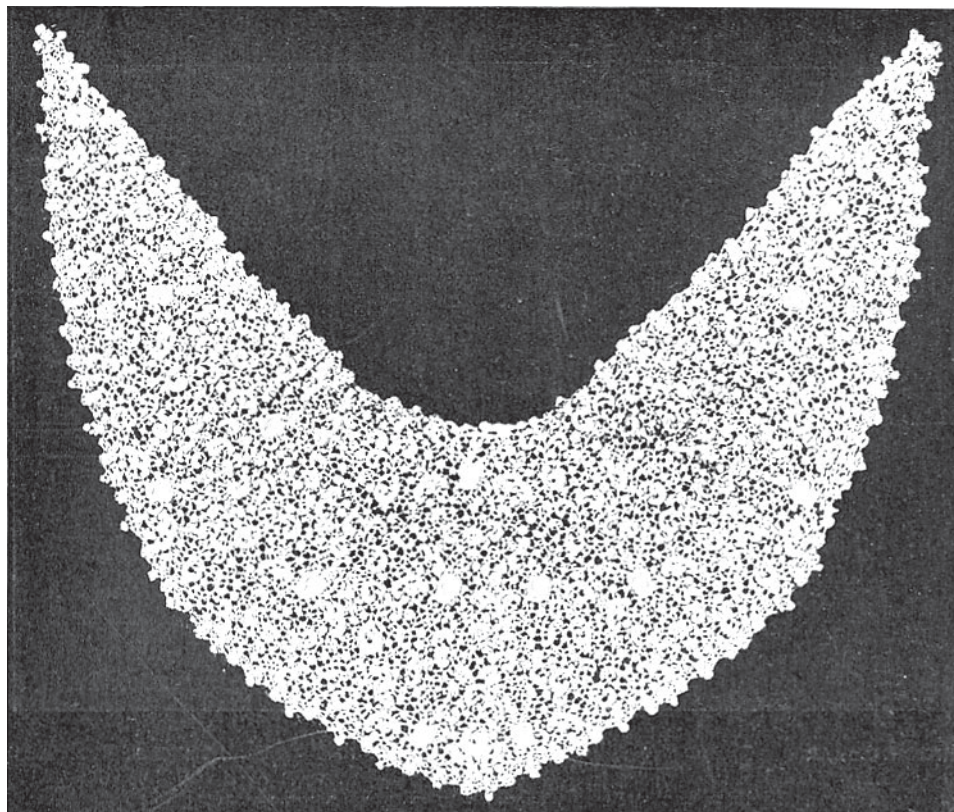
Well worth notice in a central case are some beautifully fine pieces of Rose Point. The patterns of these will stand the closest examination, constantly developing new conceits. In a single piece we find birds of many sorts, flowers, buds and



ROSE POINT, VENETIAN

GIFT OF MRS. JULIAN JAMES

Lace at the Metropolitan Museum



CAPE, ROSE POINT

GIFT OF MRS. JOHN JACOB ASTOR

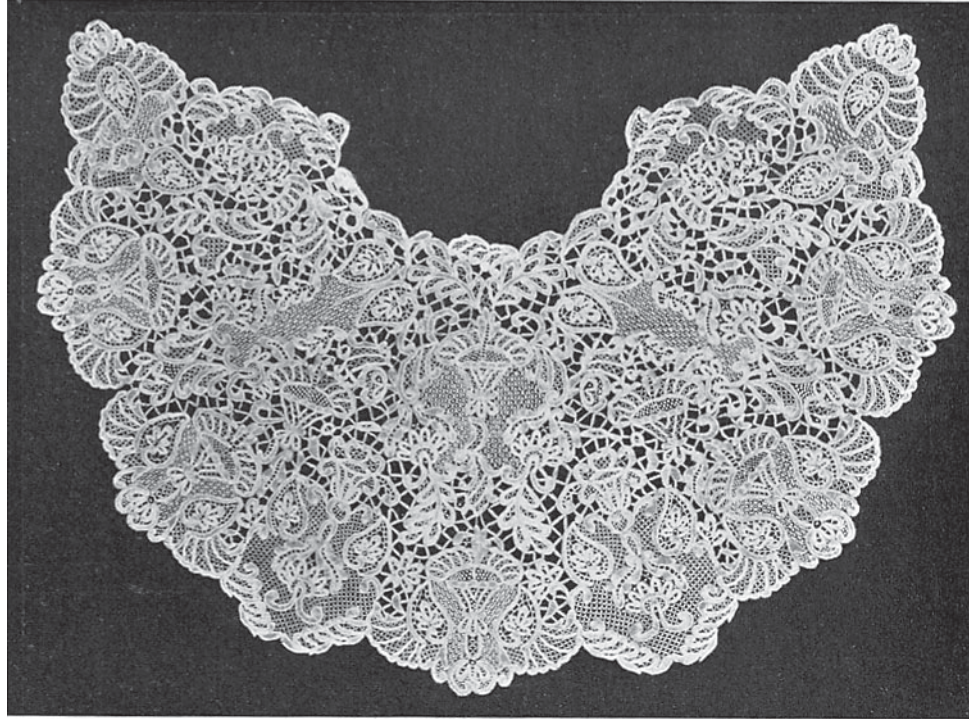
leaves, crowns, tiny figures of men and numerous animals. Another piece has little cherubs' heads with wings. All these ornaments are worked over the background of lace, the peculiarity of Rose Point being that the figures of the pattern are worked upon instead of into the groundwork. Two elaborately ornamented pieces of this lace are of graduated width, and seem designed for the front of a lady's robe. An extremely wide flounce of Rose Point shows the same complicated work.

Several wide flounces of Flemish lace are in a central case. One has figures of saints set at intervals along the pattern. Other figures are introduced. We find birds, rabbits and huge peacocks caught in the flowing lines of a flower design of carnations and leaves. The flowers are perfectly formed, each petal being distinct. The flounce has a thick, flat border, like a tape. Another and still wider Flemish lace flounce has a bold design of lilies and long, drooping leaves. This pattern, with its buds, blossoms and leaves, large and small, has a luxuriant style, and is a rich-looking piece of work. Such lace was appropriately used for very heavy garments of velvet and satin. Cloaks, trained robes

and the ceremonial garments of priests were trimmed with it. The edge of this larger flounce also has a straight line for a border. The groundwork of these heavy Flemish patterns is called "réseau," and shows the usual inequalities of a hand-made background, the mesh being of various sizes and degrees of evenness. The whole style of the lace is in direct contrast to the Venetian points, with their dainty scalloped edges, sometimes formed of the petals of flowers and their leaves as part of the pattern. There is a beautiful piece of Brussels lace of exceeding fineness, in which Neptune and his sea-horses, a spouting whale, dolphins, mermaids and many odd sea-plants figure. Another fine piece has hunting scenes and contains a hunter with his gun and dog, following a deer, which is seen in the distance. Grass, trees, hills and other features of the scenery are all to be traced here.

There are many pieces of Italian Guipures, a famous lace of the north Italian provinces, with the rich patterns and flowing styles of the Renaissance. These are bobbin laces, and when they were made with the tiny thorns, or "picots," along

Lace at the Metropolitan Museum



HONITON COLLAR

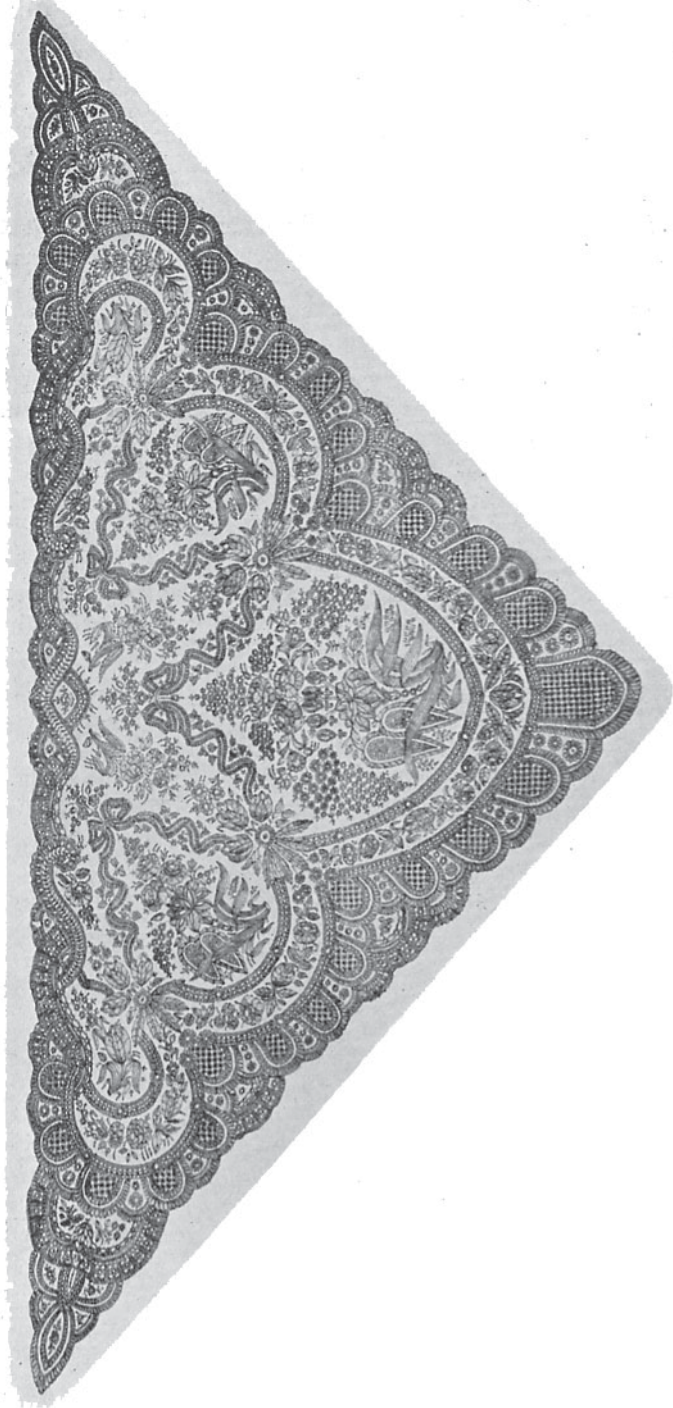
GIFT OF MRS. MARY A. WITTHAUS

the threads joining the pattern, they were known as "Guipure à Brides." When these were first manufactured in the north of Italy they were made of separate pieces, the flowers, birds or animals being joined by long stitches edged with "brides." Later the pieces were joined by a closely worked background, known as "réseau." Many of these laces have designs of birds, rabbits, deer, dogs and other animals.

Passing to the finer laces in near-by cases, there is "Burano," which is made with a needle. The mesh of this is worked perpendicularly, giving it an odd, "ruffly" appearance, and it is even closer than the Flemish laces. There are examples of Point de France, which somewhat resembles Point de Venise. This was first made in France by manufacturers who imported the lace-workers from Venice, but furnished them with French designs. This method soon produced a lace of a distinctive character. There are pieces of Point de Milan and Point de Genoa, which display slight differences and which must be examined to discover them. A lace known as "Binche" has an even mesh, and its pattern is so little to be distinguished from its grounding that one must look close to trace it. It seems related to the stiff character of the Flemish lace, but is without its decided pattern. "Brabant" lace has leaves

and flowers worked into a netlike mesh. There are some handsome examples of Brussels point, also known as Point d'Angleterre. The crown of a cap of this lace is covered with a pretty twisted pattern of conventional sort. There are a few pieces of Irish crochet, the bodice of a child's frock, which was loaned by Mrs. R. W. De Forest, and a collar. In the same case are beautiful old-fashioned collars of many sorts of fine lace, Brussels, Point d'Alençon, Honiton and Appliqué. There are also many "barbes" of these laces. One of Brussels is a good example of the different kinds of "filling" or "grounding" which may be found in one article.

Some lovely Point de France laces, of which the flowers and leaves of the pattern are joined by delicate stitches holding them in place, are in a central case. Here are also shawls, veils and flounces of Point Appliqué, Point de Gaze and Chantilly. Some exquisite shawls of these laces are displayed on forms, which were specially made to show them. A shawl of Appliqué is the gift of Mrs. Julian James, and was her wedding veil. Others of the shawls exhibited were also wedding veils, and come from old New York families. One shows a charming design of rose branches. The shape of the roses, the clusters of leaves and even the thorns on the stems are wonderfully natural. A shawl of



BLACK CHANTILLY LACE SHAWL
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Lace at the Metropolitan Museum

Limerick lace has a cornflower design, and another has a scroll and conventional pattern. A beautiful cape of Honiton lace in the same case was the gift of Mrs. Witthaus. A Point d'Alençon shawl has a pomegranate design, and the filling of the small figures is done in a different pattern from the main background.

A magnificent flounce of Point d'Angleterre has a whole case to itself, where its pattern of flowers of different kinds, trailing from an urn, and flowing arabesques can be seen to good advantage.

The Napoleon laces lent by Mrs. H. K. Porter are unique. One of them is a bit of Point d'Alençon in which the monogram of Marie Louise, wife of Napoleon, alternates with the famous "Bee" of Napoleon himself. An Alençon collar also shows the "Bee" design, and is of the same period. Other strips of lace are of Empire times. In these the dots and tiny designs in the body and above the border were significant of the time when lace began to be ruffled onto the edges of clothing, and an elaborate pattern would have been unnecessary. Among these are some long-shaped pieces of Alen-

çon, arranged for trimming for gowns. They were the gift of Mrs. Luckmeyer.

Noticeable are some fine bits of early Valenciennes. These are adorned with charming little branches of flowers or berries with leaves, and some heavier patterns than Valenciennes has to-day.

Among the lace oddities is a funny little embroidered costume of pineapple cloth, for a child. This is from the Philippines. It has trailing vines edging the bottom of the small trousers and the little blouse, and so daintily is the work done that it attracts attention, even among the magnificent and costly laces surrounding it. Another odd piece of special interest is a lampshade made by a Sioux Indian from an Italian design. Into this the worker has introduced characteristic "motifs" of his own, such as a canoe, a wigwam and a portrait of a man, possibly of the worker himself. This is a loan from Miss Amy Townsend, who has spent much time in the development of the art of lace-making among the North American Indians.

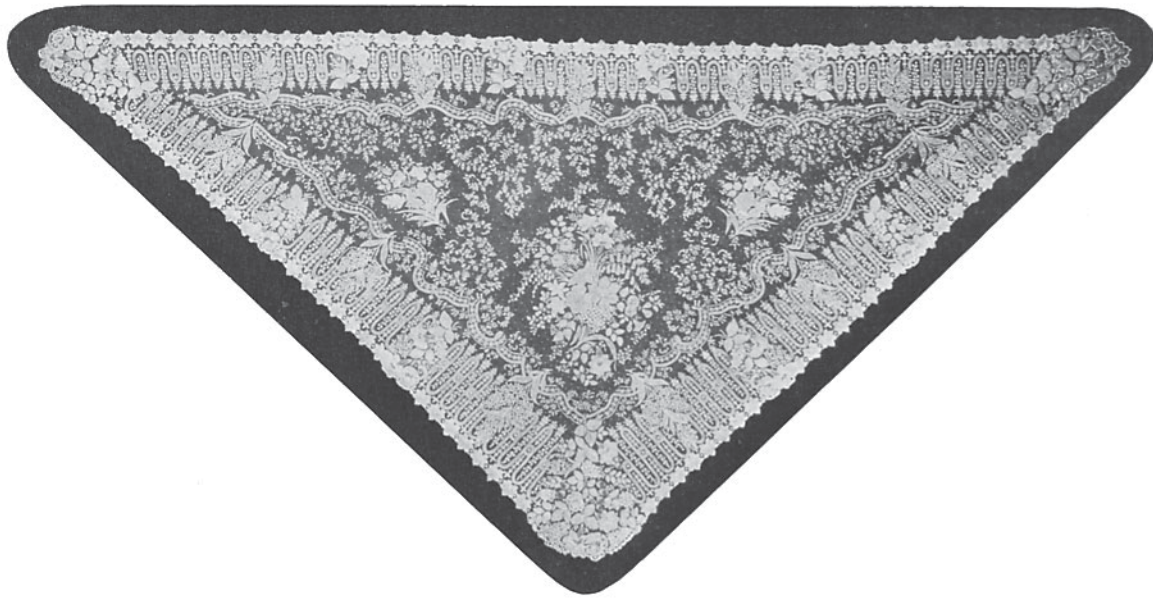
An exhibit of black lace shawls and flounces is in a wall case in the next room. This collection was

contributed to liberally by Mrs. Winters and Mrs. Witthaus. One set of shawl and flounce has a design of trailing willow branches and palms, the lace being a fine Chantilly. Another set of shawl and flounce shows tulips and roses in the pattern, the flowers being perfectly formed, with each petal distinct. There are also some Spanish lace flounces of heavy style. One large piece may have been intended for a flounce, but is more than deep enough to cover an entire skirt. This shows Orientalism in its design. All sorts



BLACK SPANISH LACE SHAWL

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM



SHAWL, MODERN POINT APPLIQUE
USED AS WEDDING VEIL

GIFT OF
MRS. JULIAN JAMES

of Eastern figures are crowded into it. There are small Chinamen in national costume, pagodas, parasols and many Chinese characters. Even the scroll surrounding the whole has a distinctly Eastern look.

A white Spanish or silk lace mantilla is in this exhibit. This was included in the collection given by Mrs. Samuel S. Howland, a daughter of August Belmont, this year. This mantilla has a full ruffled border. Another white lace shawl is of Spanish thread, which is very unusual, as Spanish laces are always made of silk. This shawl has a small pineapple figure covering the centre, arranged as a border, and forming a scallop on the edge. It was lent by Mrs. Porter. Several black Chantilly lace fans are included in this collection.

Surrounding the lace room and hung above the cases are a number of pictures, dating over several hundred years, illustrating the use of lace. Among these is a large framed exhibit, showing the method of lace-making. In this picture a lace design is given, printed in six different colours, each colour showing a part of the manufacture, and each different colour being entrusted to a different worker. The first worker does only the part printed, we will say, in blue. She simply outlines the pattern. The second worker puts in the portion printed in red, the coarser groundwork. The third does the yellow part, the finer groundwork. The fourth makes the green portion, the flower design. The fifth adds the part printed in pink, the little delicate stars on the

body of the lace. The sixth worker completes the pattern, with a heavy outline around the flower design and the edge, and so the finished piece of lace is turned out.

The lace collection came to the Museum largely by bequests and gifts. Some of the earliest of these were from Mrs. John Jacob Astor and Mrs. R. L. Stuart, who gave, in 1881, the nucleus of the present exhibit. Miss Margaret Taylor Johnston and the Misses Schuyler have been very generous. Several of the very early examples were bought by Sir Purdon Clarke with the Rogers fund. A number of single pieces are the gifts of separate individuals. Besides those mentioned, many were lent to the Museum. Mrs. Porter has lent a number, and, although living at a distance, often visits the collection. Altogether, this is the most interesting as well as valuable exhibition of laces in the country, and in many respects cannot be duplicated in the world. The present arrangement is said to be the most complete of its kind anywhere.