



Valenciennes Part I. By M. Jourdain

VALENCIENNES, part of the ancient province of Hainault, together with Lille and Arras, is French by conquest and treaty.* The lace fabric was introduced there from Le Quesnoy, one of the towns mentioned in the ordinance of August 5th, 1665, which founded on a large scale the manufacture of Point de France. Some years before, in 1646, a certain Mlle. Françoise Badar† had brought from Antwerp some young girls, whom she intended to teach lace-making, and for this purpose she took a house in the Rue de Tournay (now Rue de Lille). She afterwards undertook the direction of several manufactures, among them that of Le Quesnoy, which she left in a prosperous condition on her death in 1677,

the date that the town of Valenciennes was taken by Louis XIV.

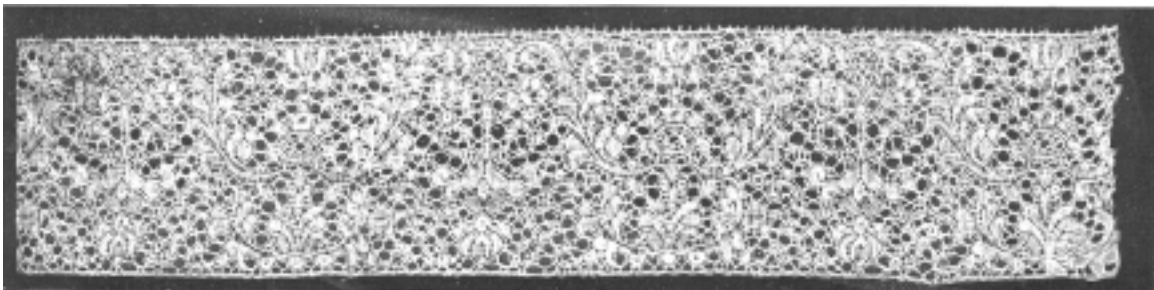
The lace of Le Quesnoy is never mentioned after Louis XIV., and after that reign Valenciennes comes into notice, but there is no record of the transfer of the fabric. The *fond de neige* ‡ is supposed to be a tradition derived from the workwomen of Le Quesnoy. Valenciennes, from its position as a commercial centre, was well fitted to carry on the industry, and the fact that the town had its "brodeurs" and "passementiers" § aided in its development. It reached its climax from 1725 to 1780, when there were from 3,000 to 4,000 lace-makers in the city alone,

* French Hainault, French Flanders and Cambrésis (the present Dép. du Nord), with Artois, were conquests of Louis XIII. and Louis XIV., confirmed to France by the treaties of Aix-la-Chapelle (1668) and Nimeguen (1678). In 1656, the Spaniards under Condé made a successful defence against the French under Turenne, but in 1677, Louis XIV. took the town, and it has always since belonged to France.

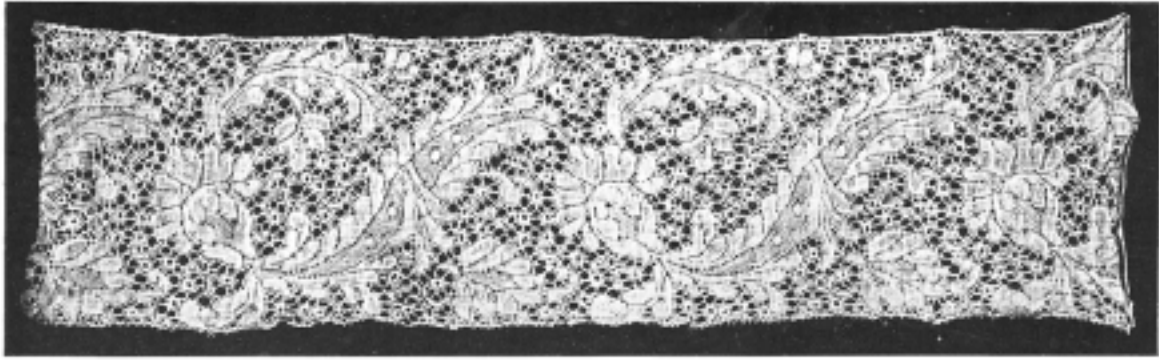
† Vie de Mlle. Françoise Badar. Liège, 1726.

‡ "Les directrices du bureau du Quesnoy, avaient, en effet adopté un genre special ce *fond de neige* qu'elles enseignèrent aux ouvrières Valencienneses."—A. Carlier, *Les Valenciennes*.

§ "L'industrie des brodeurs et des passementiers, qui était pratiquée dans cette ville à la même époque, contribue à l'épanouissement de la dentelle. Tel fut d'ailleurs la raison de l'article 21 de l'édit de l'an 1653, conférant aux maîtres passementiers le privilège exclusif de la fabrication des passements aux fuseaux, aux épingles, et sur l'oreiller."—(*Ibid.*)



No. I.—EARLY VALENCIENNES, WITH "NEIGEUX" GROUND AND CONFUSED DESIGN



No. II.—VALENCIENNES, WITH “NEIGEUX” GROUND AND SCROLL DESIGN LATE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

and the art was largely practised in the country round, to judge by the *Fausse Valenciennes*.*

Existing specimens of the Louis XIV. period—for we have not the evidence of portraits as a corroboration, as Valenciennes was never a “dentelle de grande toilette”—appear closely to resemble the designs of Venice à réseau. In specimens 416, 72, and 913, 1901, of the Victoria and Albert Museum, the long rolling scroll throwing out a number of small cut-up leaves, the large ornamented fruit—like a conventionalised pomegranate with leafy crest, are among the motifs of the fine type of late Venetian à réseau, but the Italian lace, with its clear and even needle réseau, contrasts favourably with the confused “neigeux” Valenciennes pillow ground of minute solid circles, sometimes surrounded by other circles. One of the first known specimens of the Valenciennes fabric is a lace-bordered alb, belonging to the Convent of the Visitation at Le Puy. The lace is 28 ins. wide, consisting of three breadths, very fine—though thick; the pattern is of flowers and scrolls. †

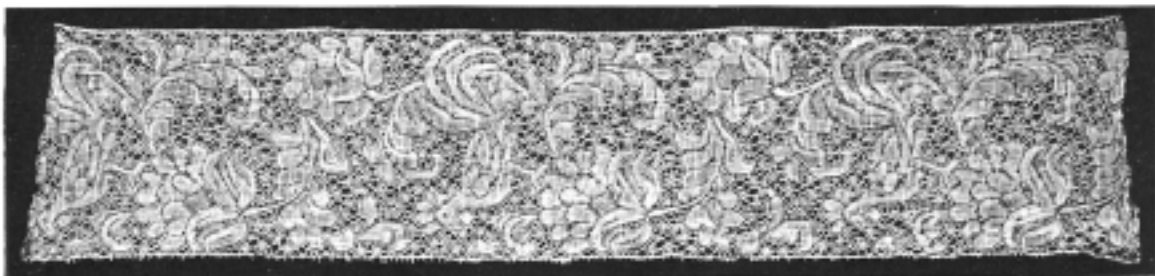
* In the seventeenth century “L’hôpital de Lille renfermait sept cent ouvrières faisant de la fausse valenciennes, très rapprochant de la vraie; on comptait tant dans cette ville que dans les environs quinze mille ouvrières travaillant de la dentelle bâtarde du fond Paris, et du fond clair.”—A. Carlier, *Les Valenciennes*.

† In Séguin, *La Dentelle*, Plate VL., Fig. 3, is a specimen of

Valenciennes was used in *negligés*, the trimmings of sheets, pillow cases, nightgowns, nightcaps, for ruffles, for barbes, fichus, and “tours de gorge.” In the *Etat d’un trousseau*, 1771, among the necessary articles are enumerated “Une coëffure, tour de gorge et le fichu plissé de vraie Valenciennes.” Madame du Barry had lappets and pillow-cases trimmed with Valenciennes. It was not used as a Church lace, being fine and ineffective.

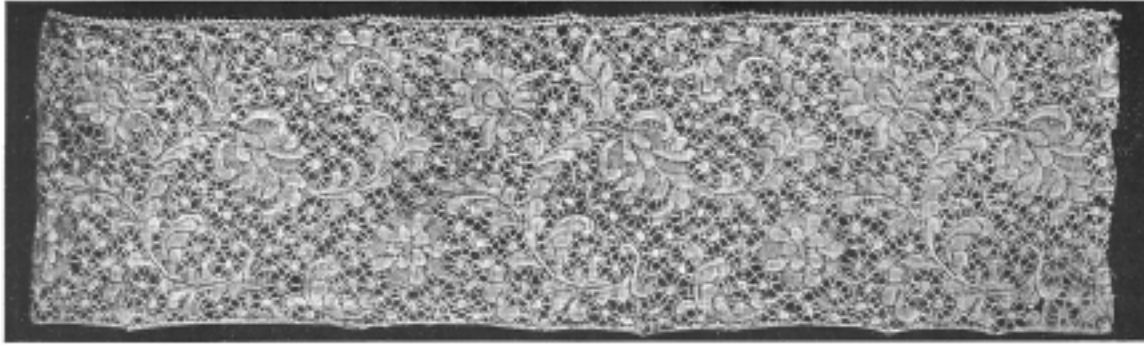
From 1780 downwards there was less demand for a lace of the quality of Valenciennes, and with the Revolution, this, with more than thirty French fabrics, disappeared. In a manuscript of M. Tordoï’s “*coup d’œil sur Valenciennes*” (de l’an IX. à l’an XIII.), we read that in the year IX. there was a cessation in the production of lace-thread. Three ateliers were subsequently established, but this short artistic revival had had no permanent result; in 1800 there were only a few hundred lace-workers within the walls; and in 1851, in spite of the efforts of Napoleon III. to revive the industry, there were only two lace-workers remaining, both upwards of eighty years of age.

Valenciennes (1670-1710), which contrasts favourably with its later developments. The design is free and light; the ground irregular and *neigeux*.



No. III.—VALENCIENNES LATE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY MUSÉE DES ARTS DÉCORATIFS, BRUSSELS

Valenciennes



No. IV.—VALENCIENNES

LATE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Pieces of Valenciennes belong mainly to the reigns of Louis XV. and XVI. Narrow straight-edged borders of pillow lace were probably made in Valenciennes and in French Flanders (as in Binche) in the early seventeenth century, consisting of running closely-crowded and indefinite designs, with a ground of a series of irregular or rounded holes between short brides.*

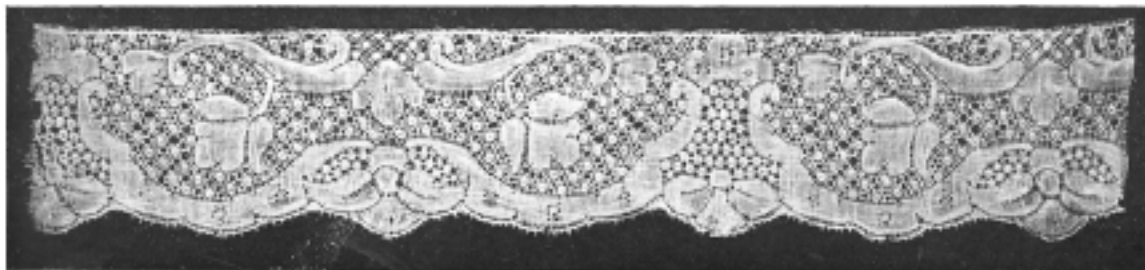
In the Louis XV. period and the late eighteenth century, the Flemish character of Valenciennes re-asserts itself in its choice of motifs such as tulips, carnations, and anemones, naturalistically treated and occasionally heavy in outline; the characteristic clear réseau ground in the subsequent reign occupies much of the place originally destined for the design, but towards 1780 little lace was made, and the disappearance of ruffles from the masculine costume added greatly to the depression. Among Empire pieces is a curious specimen in the possession of M. Dupont Auber-ville, representing Napoleon I. as an equestrian Cæsar facing the Empress Josephine; while the

Imperial arms, flanked at the base by cannons and flags, appear between the two.

In Valenciennes, unlike Brussels and Milanese pillow lace, the ground is worked at the same time as the pattern, that is to say, threads are brought out from the pattern to form the réseau and carried back into the pattern, so that the threads do not follow the lines of the ornament, as they do in all pillow laces where the ornament or *toile* is made separately. The Valenciennes method thus requires an enormous number of pins, because each thread must be kept in place until the whole width of the pattern is worked.

Like Mechlin, the ground went through various modifications—including the *fond de neige* already noticed as accompanying early scroll patterns—before the réseau was finally fixed. Several of these ornamental grounds are used in various portions of the design, in No. v, where two or three varieties can be counted, which are much thicker and closer in effect than the characteristic Valenciennes réseau. In this ground each side of its mesh, which is more diamond than hexagon in shape, is formed of four threads plaited together. The clearly marked hexagonal mesh of the Mechlin réseau is also formed of four threads, but only two of its sides are plaited, the other four being twisted.

* “Ce fut à peu près vers le même époque que l'on comença à faire dans la Flandre française, à Valenciennes et aux environs, des dentelles à bords droits, à dessins courants, dont les lignes très-mates et très rapprochées imitaient un peu le genre vermiculé; le travail, sauf le réseau qui n'existait pas alors et était suppléé par des brides, en était tout-à-fait pareil à celui des Valenciennes actuelles.”—*Séguin*.



No. V.—VALENCIENNES

EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

SHOWING VARIOUS FANCY GROUNDS

Fancy grounds were produced side by side with the above described mesh, as the accounts of Madame du Barry bear witness, until late in the eighteenth century. When their grounds were thus mixed and varied, such laces, although their patterns are almost identically the same as those of Valenciennes with the pure réseau, are termed "Fausses Valenciennes." This has been taken to mean that these laces were made in the neighbourhood of the town of Valenciennes, in Hainault and elsewhere, not in Valenciennes itself, where the simple distinctive *réseau* alone was used.

A legend has arisen about *vraie* "Valenciennes." In support of the theory that the "true" lace was only made in the town itself, M. Dieudonné, Préfet du Nord in 1804, wrote, "This beautiful manufacture is so inherent in the place that it is an established fact that if a piece of lace were begun at Valenciennes and finished outside the walls, the part which had not been made at Valenciennes would be visibly less beautiful and less perfect than the other, though continued by the same lace-maker with the same thread on the same pillow." M. Dieudonné attributed it to the influence of the atmosphere.



No. VI.—VALENCIENNES (WIRE GROUND)
MUSÉE DE CLUNY

"All by the same hand" we find entered in the bills of the lace-sellers of the time. The superiority of the city-made lace no doubt depended largely on the fact that it was made in underground cellars, in which the dampness* of the air affected the "tension" of the very fine thread in use. In a drier atmosphere outside the walls, a different result would be obtained, even by the same workwoman, with the same cushion and thread, though it is doubtful whether the experiment has ever been actually tried.† The necessity for a humid atmosphere was recognised early in the eighteenth century. In an extract from the *Procès verbaux du Bureau du Commerce*, 1727, it is stated that in Holland or in England it would be impossible to "conserver les filets dans le point de fraîcheur et d'humidité convenables pour façonner des toilettes."‡

* "En 1780 plusieurs milliers de dentellières travaillaient dans l'enceinte de la ville, généralement dans des caves ou des chambres basses. Grâce à l'humidité le fil

était de retors, ou ne se détordait pas, et conservait toute sa force."—*A. Carlier, Les Valenciennes.*

† "Le fil employé pour quelques pièces fines était d'une telle susceptibilité que l'haleine de l'ouvrière le modifiait et que sa teinte se trouvait influencée par le soleil et l'humidité."—(*Ibid.*)

‡ *Le Point de France.* Mme. Laurence de Laprade, 1904.

(To be continued.)

