



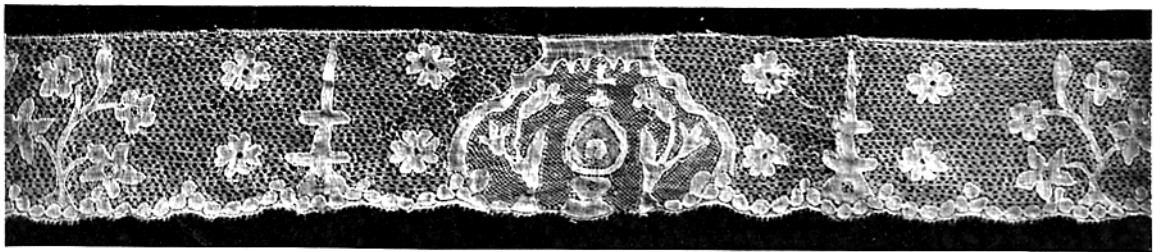
Mechlin and Antwerp Lace

By M. Jourdain

THE hypothesis that lace was made in the time of Charles V., towards 1500,* because the Low Countries then attained their "greatest intellectual expansion," is, of course, absurdly and entirely fantastic, and the political troubles of Mechlin in the

Charles V., even *if* lace had been made there as early as the fifteenth century.†

Prior to 1665 nearly all Flanders laces were known under the name of Mechlin to the French commercial world. "The common people here," writes Regnard,



NO. I.—MECHLIN LACE (DATED 1757)

MUSÉE DES ARTS DÉCORATIFS, BRUSSELS

fifteenth and sixteenth centuries would have entirely counterbalanced the initial prosperity of the reign of

who visited Flanders in 1681, "as throughout all Flanders, occupy themselves in making the white lace known as Malines." The laces of Ypres, Bruges, Dunkirk and Courtrai, according to Savary, passed under the name of Mechlin at Paris. Peuchet ‡

* "Peut-on conclure, comme Mme. Bury Palliser semble le faire, que les *vraies Malines* ne furent faites que vers 1665? Nous ne le pensons pas, et croyons qu'il n'est nullement téméraire de les croire du temps de Charles Quint *vers 1500* car ce fut sous le règne de ce grand Empereur que le Pays-Bays eurent leur plus grande expansion intellectuelle."—*Collection d'anciennes Dentelles flamandes de feu Madame Augusta, Baronne Liedts, donnée à la ville de Bruges (Musée de Gruuthuuse)*, 1889.

† An important corporation of weavers of Mechlin were scattered by the political troubles of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

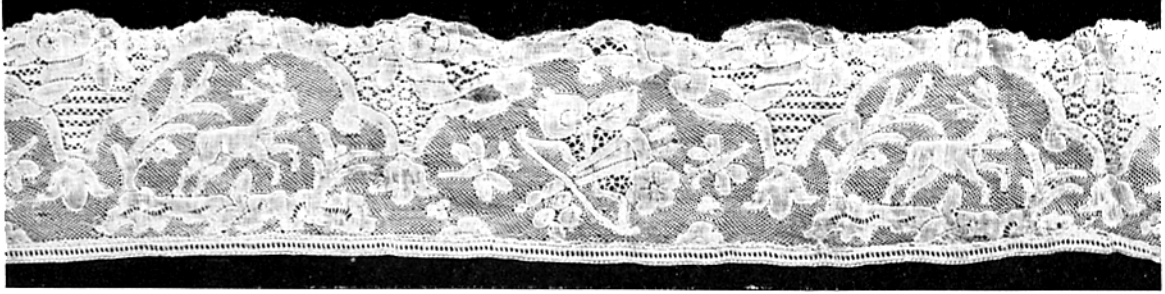
‡ *Dictionnaire Universel de la Géographie commerciale.*—J. Peuchet, 1799.



NO. II.—MECHLIN LACE

MUSÉE HISTORIQUE DES TISSUS, LYONS

The Connoisseur



NO. III.—MECHLIN LACE

MUSÉE HISTORIQUE DES TISSUS, LYONS

writes that a great deal of "Malines" was made in Antwerp,* Mechlin, and Brussels, and that the industry was an important one at Antwerp. He adds that an excellent quality of thread is made in the town and neighbourhood.

In England Mechlin is not mentioned by name until Queen Anne's reign.†

In 1699 the Act prohibiting foreign lace was repealed in so far as it touched the Spanish Low Countries, and Anne, while prohibiting lace made "in the dominions of the French king," admits the import of Flanders lace, so that from the first years of the eighteenth century Mechlin was without rival in England among light laces. According to Peuchet Mechlin laces are "les plus belles, après celles de Bruxelles, et elles ont un peu plus de durée." It was eminently suited to the less severe modern costume which came in with the eighteenth century, and by

its open à jours and transparent appearance, to be worn as a trimming lace. It thus remained in fashion through the eighteenth century, when references like "Mechlin the queen of lace," "Mechlin the finest lace of all," bear witness to a vogue in England little short of extraordinary. The disappearance of lace ruffles before 1780 from women's sleeves, and the disappearance of the cravat and men's ruffles, put an end to lace as a fashionable adjunct to dress. In 1834 there were but eight houses where it was fabricated.‡ Unfortunately, also, for the prosperity of the industry, Mechlin is of all laces the easiest to copy in machine-made lace.

Historically, Mechlin developed, like Valenciennes, from the straight-edged laces of indefinite pattern, and an irregular ground § which has the appearance of being pierced at intervals with round holes.||

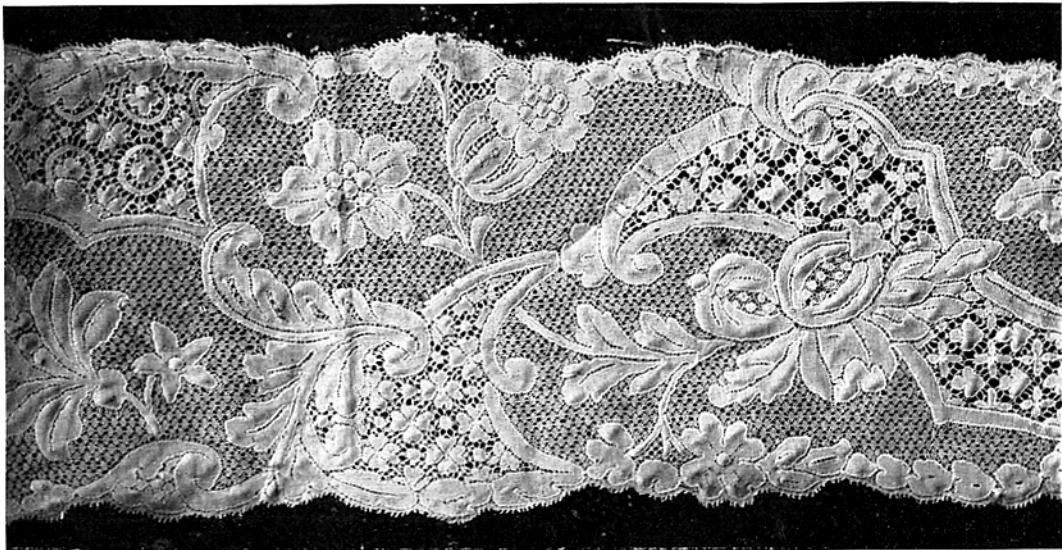
* Specimens of Mechlin lace are preserved in the Steen Museum at Antwerp.

† "Flanders lace" is the only term used for Flemish laces in the Great Wardrobe Accounts until Queen Anne, when "Macklin" and Brussels are first noted down.

‡ Mechlin lace was also made at Antwerp, Lierre, and Turnhout. "There was a fine collection of Mechlin lace in the Paris Exhibition of 1867 from Turnhout, and some other localities."—*Mrs. Palliser, History of Lace.*

§ See Valenciennes.

|| In the Gruuthuus collection, laces of this type which have



NO. IV.—MECHLIN LACE, SHOWING QUATREFOIL FILLING

Mechlin and Antwerp Lace

The earliest examples of what we can recognise as Mechlin show a design consisting of groupings of heavily drawn flowers, clumsily designed rococo devices, cornucopias, etc. (see No. iii.).

Later, with the adoption of the characteristic Mechlin réseau, the floral design becomes more delicate and light, and a French influence is apparent.* Much of this lace, worn in France during the Regency and later, was made up in the style of modern insertion, with an edging on both sides, † *campané* or scalloped, and used for the gathered trimmings called *quilles*, like the Argentan sleeve-trimmings of Madame Louise de France painted by Nattier in 1748.

The attempt to imitate Alençon extended not only to the motifs of its design—the characteristic winding riband and scattered sprays of flowers, ‡ but to the button-hole

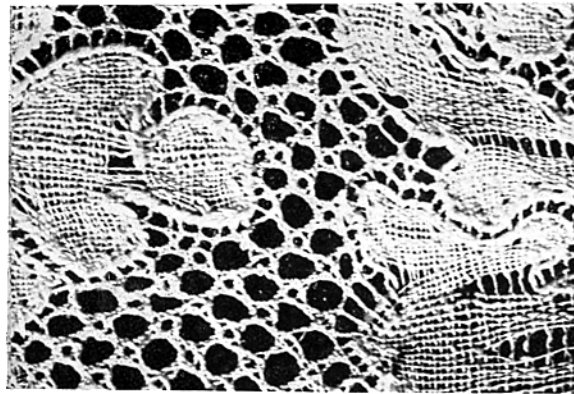
“points d’esprit” (small solid portions like the millet seed of Genoese lace) are invariably attributed to Mechlin, while in the Cinquantenaire Museum at Brussels they are attributed to Antwerp.

* “La France et la Hollande en consommait beaucoup autrefois.”—*Puchet*.

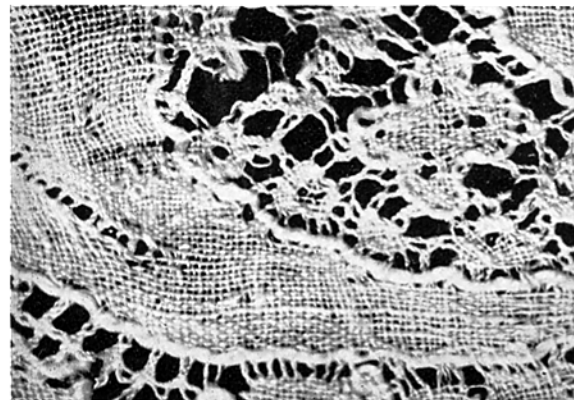
† 1741. “Une coiffure de nuit de Malines à raizeau campanée de deux pieces.”—*Inv. de Mademoiselle de Clermont*.

1761. “Une paire de manches de Malines bridée en campanées.”—*Inv. de la Duchesse de Modène*.

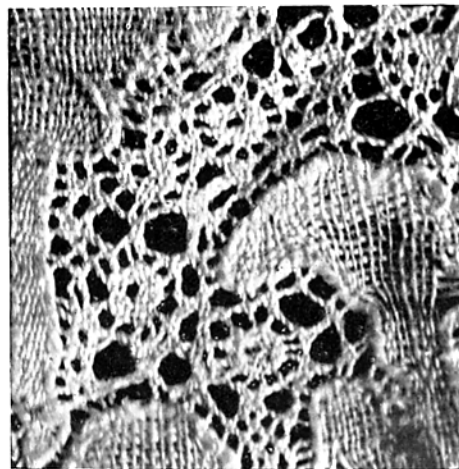
‡ The sprigs in Mechlin are, however, clumsier in drawing.



No. V.—ENLARGEMENT OF MECHLIN, SHOWING FANCY GROUND



No. VI.—PIECE OF MECHLIN ENLARGED, SHOWING CORDONNET AND QUATREFOIL FILLING



No. VII.—ENLARGEMENT OF MECHLIN, SHOWING FANCY GROUND

stitched cordonnet. In Mechlin a coarse thread was applied to the edges of the design, which gives higher relief than the flat cordonnet. § The fillings are often, like Alençon, of the trellis type (No. viii.).

The open fancy fillings || render the lace very effective when worn over

colour. The late eighteenth century Mechlin has pieces quite undistinguishable in design from Alençon of the Louis XVI. period, no doubt owing to its large consumption in France as a summer lace. The very characteristic pattern of a flower (sun-flower?) in full blossom and with closing petals is often met with in Mechlin laces of the end of the eighteenth century. This lace has a border with a very shallow scallop or

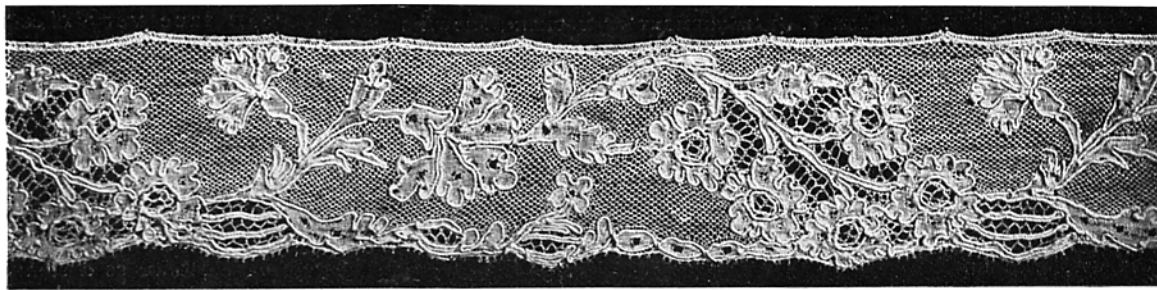
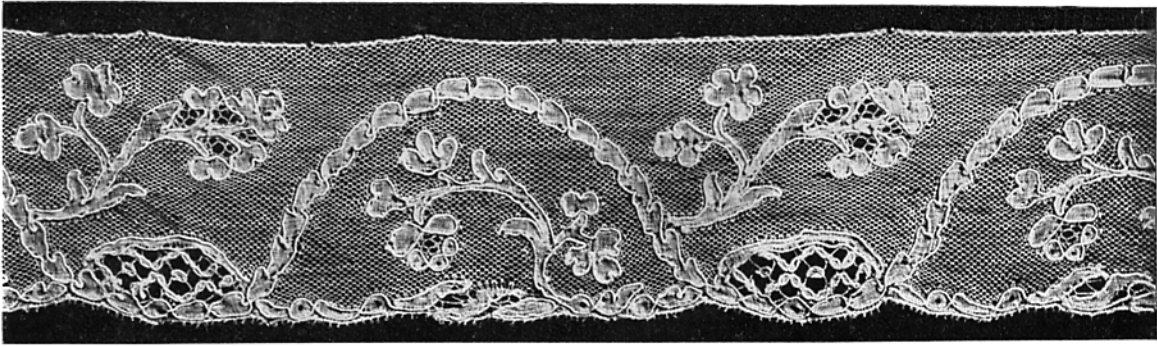
slightly waved. The pattern of repeated sprigs of flowers with a single leaf follows the edge. The remaining ground is covered with small square spots, minute quatrefoils, or leaflets. The flower is Flemish ¶ in treatment, while the semés upon the réseau

§ No. 1297-'72 in the Victoria and Albert Museum shows this thick twisted thread stretched to the gimp of the flower or pattern.

|| A very common filling is a series or combination of linked quatrefoils.

¶ Some of the designs of Mechlin show very careful naturalistic presentment of flowers.

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NO. VIII.—MECHLIN, SHOWING ALENÇON INFLUENCE IN ITS DESIGN AND IN THE COARSER CORDONNET
MUSÉE DES ARTS DÉCORATIFS, BRUSSELS

show the French influence of the late eighteenth century.

Design in Mechlin is in general floral in character. But a curious figured design is illustrated in Séguin (*La Dentelle*, Plate XIV., Fig. 1), and characterised by him as “une niaserie enfantine.” This piece, which dates from the last years of Louis XV., represents two men in a carriage driving a horse. The men wear three-cornered hats, long coats, ruffles; two birds are flying in the air, and the group is separated from its repeat by an ill-drawn tree. A piece in the Victoria and Albert Museum* has a pattern of trees, buds, and scrolls, with cupids blowing horns and shooting at winged and burning

hearts. A fragment of an altar cloth in the Gruuthuus Museum † shows a medallion containing figures representing some scriptural scene. A similar piece, including several similar medallions, is in the Cinquantenaire Museum at Brussels.

The ground and ornament of Mechlin, like Valenciennes, are made in one piece on the pillow; and many and various experimental fancy groundings were tried before adopting the hexagon-meshed réseau made of two threads twisted twice on four sides, and four threads plaited three times on the two other sides, producing a shorter plait and a smaller mesh than that of the Brussels réseau.

The early grounds are varieties of the “fond de

* 1400-74.

† Litt. B., No. 6.



NO. IX.—MECHLIN LACE, WITH MEDALLIONS OF SCRIPTURAL SUBJECTS MUSÉE DES ARTS DÉCORATIFS, BRUSSELS

Mechlin and Antwerp Lace

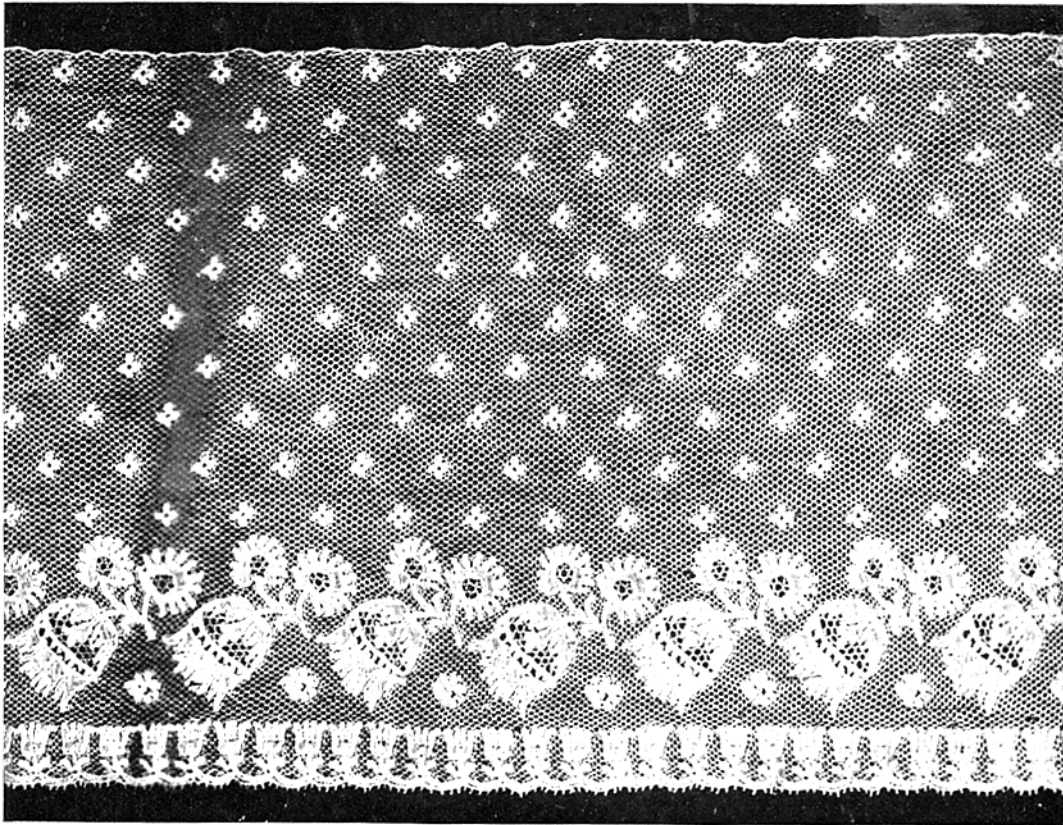
neige," and the *fond-chant* or six-pointed star mesh is met with. A *réseau* of interlaced double threads is also of frequent occurrence, and a *réseau* of four threads plaited to form a very large mesh having the effect of an enlarged *fond-chant* ground.

The most common form of ornamental filling is an arrangement of linked quatrefoils.

The *toile* is finer and less close in texture than Valenciennes, and appears to be now dense and

Mrs. Palliser considered the *motif* to be a survival from an earlier design, including the figure of the Virgin and the Annunciation, though it does not appear that any such composition has been met with.† The motif of a vase of flowers is a common one among Flemish and Belgian laces; and the flowers are not restricted to the Annunciation lilies—roses, pinks, sunflowers, and other flowers being met with.

The ground varies from a coarse *fond-chant* to



NO. X.—MECHLIN LACE, LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM

cloudy, now thin and almost transparent. This unevenness of quality, together with the presence of the *cordonet* (which gives precision to the ornament), is responsible for the old name of *broderie de Malines*.

ANTWERP LACE.

Antwerp, though an old lace-making centre,* is remarkable for only one type of peasant lace, the *Potten Kant*, so-called from the representation of a pot of flowers with which it is always decorated.

* See Mechlin.

various large meshed coarse and fancy grounds. The laces are usually straight-edged. The pot, or vase, or basket is not always part of the design; a stiff group of flowers, throwing out branches to right and left, is almost invariable. Sometimes pendant festoons or garlands, or bunches of flowers are met

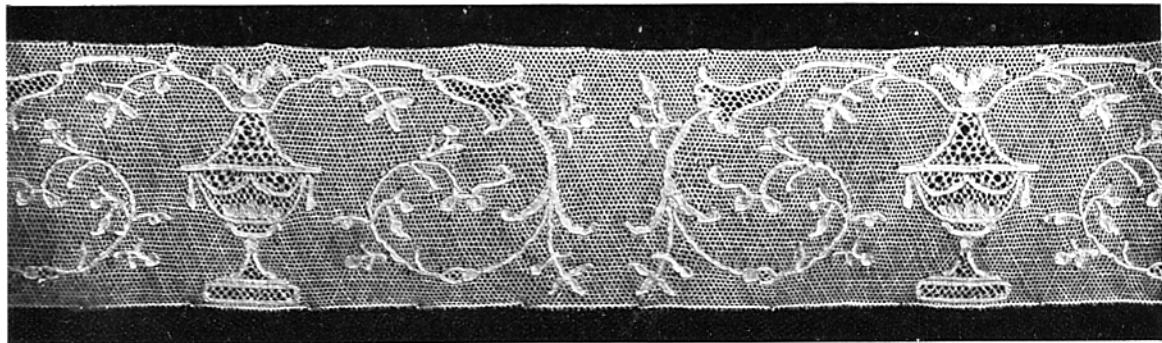
† "The flower-pot was a symbol of the Annunciation. In the early representations of the appearance of the Angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary, lilies are placed either in his hand, or set as an accessory in a vase. As Romanism declared, the angel disappeared, and the lily-pot became a vase of flowers; subsequently the Virgin was omitted, and there only remained the vase of flowers."—Mrs. Palliser.

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No. XI.—ANTWERP POTTEN KANT

MUSÉE DES ARTS DÉCORATIFS, BRUSSELS



No. XII.—ANTWERP POTTEN KANT WITH FOND CHANT GROUND

MUSÉE DES ARTS DÉCORATIFS, BRUSSELS

with.* The cordonnet of strong untwisted thread

often appears too coarse for the *toile*, and outlines it with short loops. Antwerp lace appears in a portrait of Anna Goos (1627 to 1691) in the Plantin Museum at Antwerp. The date of the portrait is between 1665-70, and the lace, which is straight-edged, has a thin formal scroll pattern upon a *réseau* ground.

* 1570-72, Victoria and Albert Museum, is a border of Antwerp lace with a loosely twisted sort of *œil de perdrix* ground, and pattern of flowers and leaves. The outline to the pattern and the gimp of the leaves and flowers are like those seen in some of the early eighteenth century Mechlin laces.

