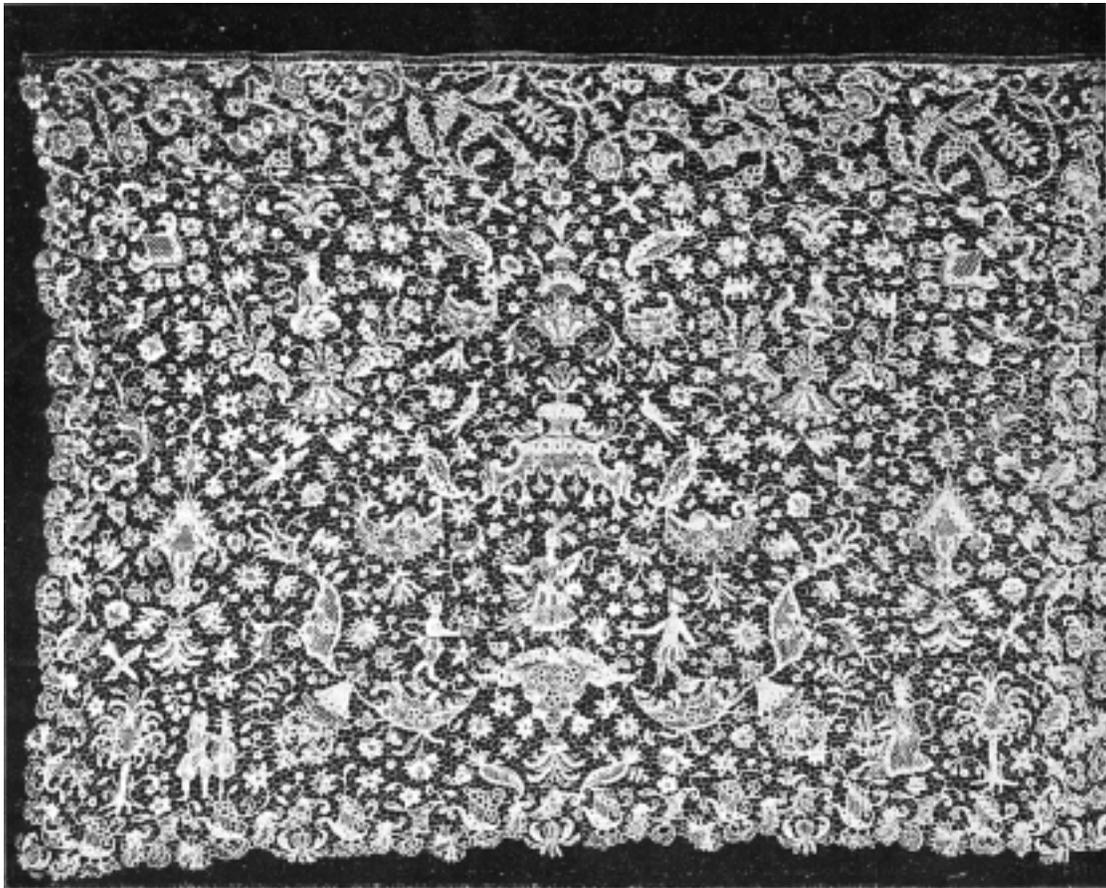




HUMAN FIGURES IN LACE
BY MRS. F. NEVILL JACKSON

FOR the collector of lace who wishes to specialise, there is no more interesting department of the subject than the representation of the human figure in lace. It is so much more satisfactory to have a completely representative collection of one offshoot of a great subject than to possess specimens of every type and style without the cohesive influence of any main idea to give point to the whole.

The advantage of using the human figure in lace as the thread on which to hang the pearls of our collection is, that by its means we are able to include specimens of nearly every kind of antique handmade lace known, for though figures appear chiefly in the most costly and elaborate types, such as the earliest efforts of the Chateau Lonray, which afterwards developed the Alençon lace, but were first known as points de France; in Venetian point, and in the finest Valenciennes and point de Flandres; yet figures also appear in the most primitive and archaic types, such as the old laces of Crete and the Ionian



ONE OF A PAIR OF CRAVAT ENDS OF POINT DE FRANCE LACE LATE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY WITH MALE AND FEMALE FIGURES IN THE COURT DRESS OF THE PERIOD AND PSEUDO-ORIENTAL FIGURES REPRESENTED



HUMAN FIGURES IN LACIS DARNED NETTING
FROM A SERIES OF LACE PICTURES REPRESENTING THE MONTHS

Isles, besides the well defined and sometimes elaborate representations in Greek lace.

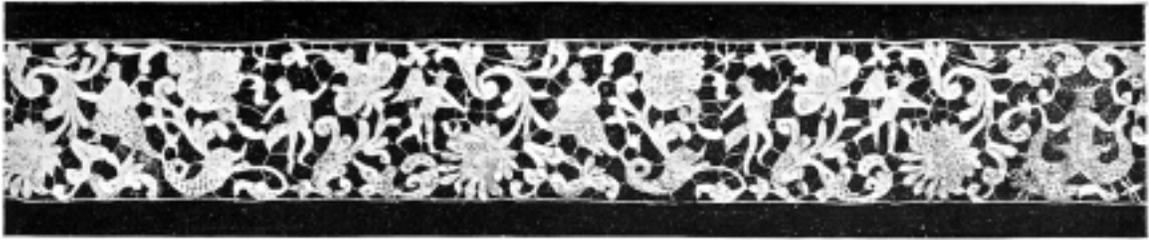
In all the early forms of open-work ornamentation, which may be described as embryonic lace, such as drawn linen work, *punto tirato*, darned netting, *punto recamato*, figures appear, often in archaic and grotesque forms—human heads having the bodies of birds, beasts, or fishes, mermaids, beasts of the apocalypse, centaurs, and other mythological forms sometimes appearing; the medieval and pre-renaissance form of design, though chiefly simply geometric, occasionally showing a startlingly elaborate human figure.

The most elaborate representations are to be found in lacis, or darned netting. The reason is not far to seek, for the method of work is so simple and quick in comparison with the more laborious kinds of work with the needle point, that much more elaborate pieces could be attempted. The sixteenth century lacis had a net-work ground of square meshes, the *opus araneum* or spider ground. This was made by

beginning with a single stitch, as in the netting of the present day, and increasing a stitch on each side until the piece was of the requisite dimensions; on finishing the strip when of the required size, a stitch was reduced on each side until one only remained. This plain netting ground was called *rézeuil*, from which the word *resseau*, or net ground work of modern handmade lace, in distinction from the bars or ties, is derived. The word "lacis" was used for the net when embroidered. Lengths of plain *rézeuil* were used for window curtains, bed hangings, and coverlets, and lacis was used for the dresses of saints for altar hangings, besides very many domestic purposes.

Sometimes greater variety of effect and additional solidity was obtained by alternating squares of plain or embroidered or cut linen with the lacis, and the armorial bearings of the owner were frequently used as the design. A splendidly elaborate specimen of human figures in "lacis," dating back as far as the seventeenth century, still exists. It is an ecclesiastical piece, measuring three yards in length, and

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BORDER OF NEEDLEPOINT LACE SHOWING FEMALE FIGURES WITH MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS, WINGED CUPIDS EQUIPPED WITH BOW AND ARROWS, MALE FIGURES, DOLPHINS, AND PEACOCKS ALSO APPEAR PERIOD, SEVENTEENTH CENTURY; WIDTH OF LACE, $3\frac{1}{2}$ INCHES

shows with marvellous skill apostles with angels and saints.

The subjects of nearly all the most elaborate pictures in lacis have been Biblical incidents, or the portraits of Old or New Testament characters; occasionally alternate squares of linen and darned netting give a series of pictures setting forth the history of the Creation; incidents in the life of Joseph, or records of the life of the holy family, when the presentation of gifts by the Magi, the flight into Egypt, and so on,

work — work which had hitherto been executed exclusively for Church vestments and furniture.

In the *City Match* Jasper Magne says:—

“She works religious petticoats for flowers.
She'll make church histories. Her needle doth
So sanctify my cushionets besides.
My frock sleeves have such holy embroideries
And are so learned, that I fear in time
All my apparel will be quoted by
Some pious instructor.”

Kings, queens, princes, and princesses have had



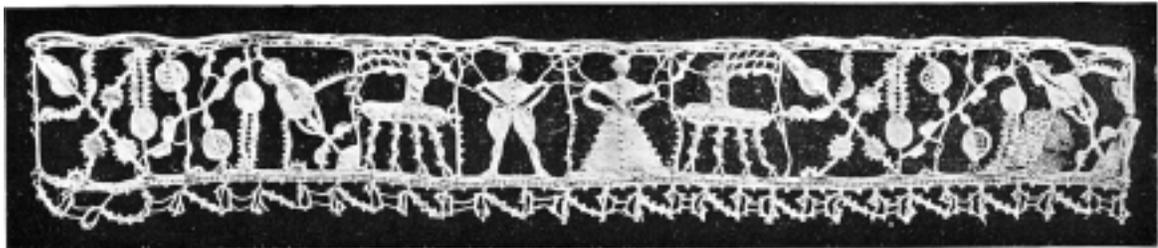
PART OF ABOVE

will be crudely given. These pieces can hardly be termed ecclesiastical lace, for they were frequently made for household use when the Puritan spirit of the day demanded the frequent reference to Holy Writ, and the commonest articles of daily use bore ostentatious testimony to the familiarity of their owners with the text of the Scriptures.

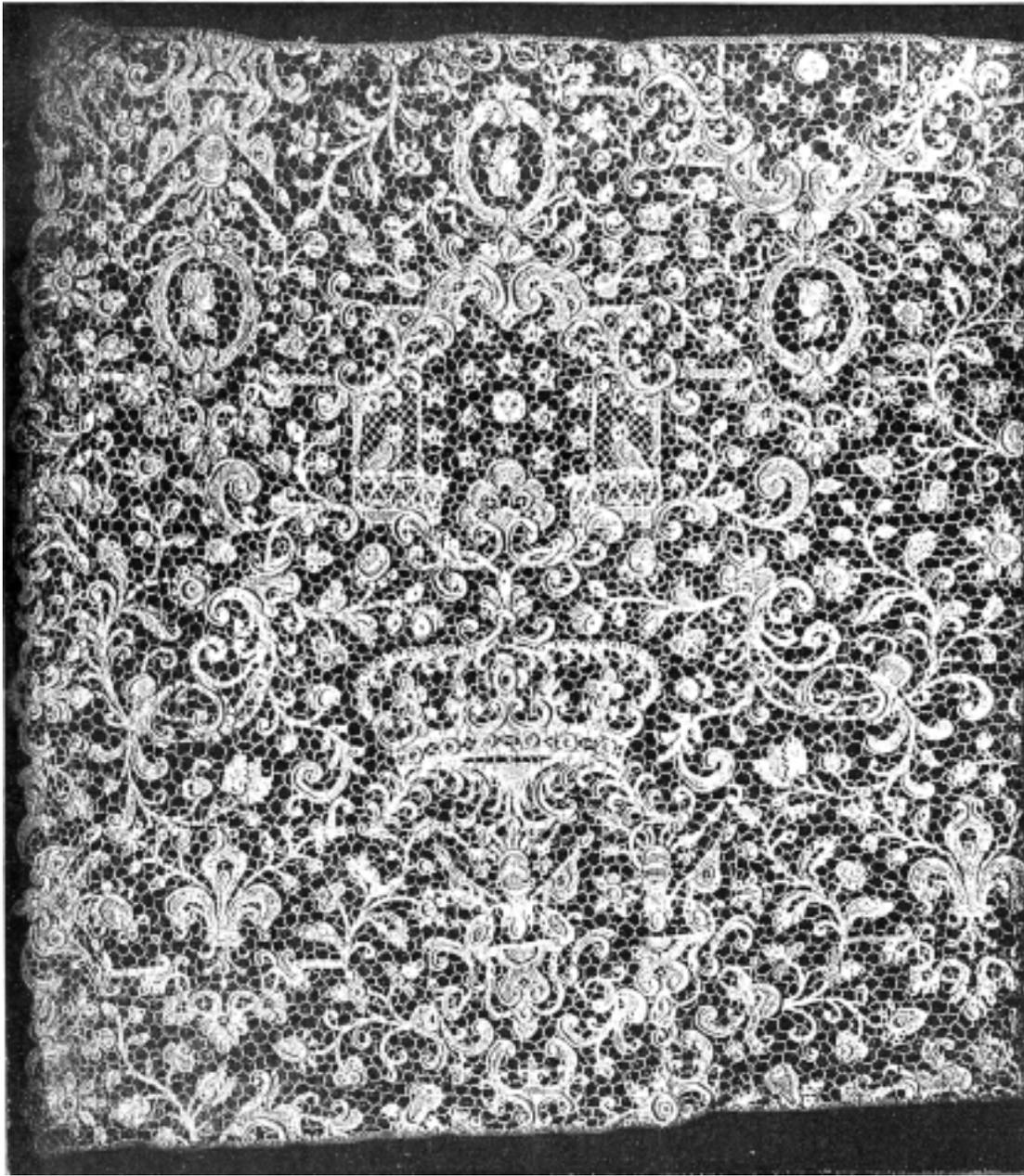
It was towards the end of the reign of James I. that the Puritan ladies devoted themselves especially to representing religious subjects in lace and cut-

their portraits executed in lace. A splendid specimen was shown us recently of King Charles of Spain, whose full-length figure was formed by the bobbins in a beautiful Valenciennes flounce. The date, 1661, was also worked into the design, and the King, then about in his sixth year (he died in 1700), was shown in the long hooped skirt and full sleeves with turned back cuffs with which the pictures of Vandyke have familiarised us.

It is hardly to be wondered at that early Alençon,



BORDER OF NEEDLEPOINT LACE SHOWING MALE AND FEMALE FIGURES IN THE DRESS OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY



NEEDLEPOINT LACE WITH MEDALLIONS CONTAINING VIGNETTE PORTRAITS
PERIOD, LOUIS XVI

the point de France, Royal lace *par excellence*, should furnish many specimens of royal portraits in lace. The factory was instituted by the statesman Colbert, who brought from Italy skilled lace workers to teach the French peasants how to make the magnificent points on which the nobles were squandering their fortunes and impoverishing the country by paying away large sums to Italy and Flanders. The lace industry was fostered by royalty, given exclusive privileges in 1665, and named Point de France by

Louis XIV. Both he and his successors, Louis XV. and Louis XVI., loved to deck their own persons with the splendid needlepoint lace, to order all who attended court to wear it and no other kind, and to give orders for the most costly and extravagant gifts for their favourites to be made of the lovely lace.

Many of these gift pieces contained the portrait in delicate medallions of the royal donor, and full length figures in miniature of courtiers, ladies playing musical instruments, and the most extravagantly

Human Figures in Lace

dressed Indians characteristic of this period were worked into the design.

The appearance of Indian figures, such as are shown in the beautiful cravat ends in our illustration, form an important landmark in the history of French lace. Such figures indicate the date of its make to have been the end of the seventeenth or early half of the eighteenth century. They invariably show the odd kilt-like skirt reaching to the knees, and on the head upstanding feathers; sometimes the upper half of the body is clothed; sometimes a hunting implement is slung across from left to right.

Other figures of a pseudo-Oriental character are also to be found in Venetian point or French lace of the later seventeenth and early eighteenth century. A Japanese or Chinese style of feature and head-dress are traceable, and the taste which demanded negro attendants, Oriental lacquer plaques inlaid in furniture, Nankin teapots, and Indian gods in the boudoirs of the period, is traceable in the design of the lace of the day, where Indian, Japanese, and Chinese figures appear half Europeanised but distinctly Oriental, showing that they were inspired by Oriental models.

In Argentan lace elaborately dressed figures are found in seventeenth century specimens, though not so frequently as in the Alençon of the same period, the larger and bolder designs of Argentan lending themselves less readily to the minute detail required

in representing the human figure. It is this necessary elaboration which has been the cause of the gradual dying out of the figure in lace designs; the modern tendency even in fine hand-made lace is towards simple flowing patterns, the comparative costliness of modern labour demands it, and the competition in cheap reproductions has also had much to do with the less close and painstaking work now produced. Where is the worker to be found who can afford to spend two years of life on a bobbins or needlepoint lappet, or the lace merchant who will pay the price which must be demanded for so much labour at the present rate of wage earning for skilled labour? When the nuns worked at the convents time was no object; emblems or a medallion portrait of the saint were worked into the lace in which the figure was to be dressed, and the more elaborate the design the greater the pleasure of the pious worker.

The modern tendency towards simplification of a design is well shown in Antwerp Pot lace, Potten Kant, a well-known pattern in bobbins lace. The original design included a figure of the Virgin, a pot of Annunciation lilies on either side, doves and an angel hovering near. The figures have entirely disappeared in recent times. Of two specimens which are before me now, one shows a dove but no angel; in the other the pot with lilies only is shewn; all the other items which once gave point and significance to the lace picture are omitted.



INDIAN FIGURE IN KILT-SHAPED GARMENT
AND FEATHERED HEADDRESS
CHARACTERISTIC OF LACE MADE IN FRANCE
EARLY IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY