



Gros Point de Venise owned by Mrs. Harris Fahnestock

Antique Laces of American Collectors

A Book by Miss Frances Morris, the President of the Needle and Bobbin Club, and Miss Marian Hague, Vice-President

ASCHOLARLY interest in the beauties of lace is recent in the art study of our country. The gracious ladies of formal elegance who were our forebears in Colonial and early Victorian times knew laces, for they wore them daily, and it was part of

The proof that things are different now, that although we wear less rare lace we study more its history, is the publication of so important a folio volume as that of Miss Frances Morris and Miss Marian Hague.

Here the story of lace is vitally told, from

the threads of which were drawn out to make a thin foundation on which to work increasingly ingenious and beautiful stitches.

Reticella, this early style was called, the name looking for its origin to the Italian *rete*, a net, for it was veritably a net, with the



Chalice veil, Italian, 17th Century, owned by Mrs. George J. Whelan



The Holy Family, painting by Rubens, which was evidently taken as a model by the lace maker whose bobbins wove the exquisite chalice veil owned by Mrs. Whelan



Book cover of Italian cut-work and reticella, 17th Century, owned by Miss Eleanor G. Hewitt

every lady's education to know honiton from duchesse and needle-point from bobbin lace.

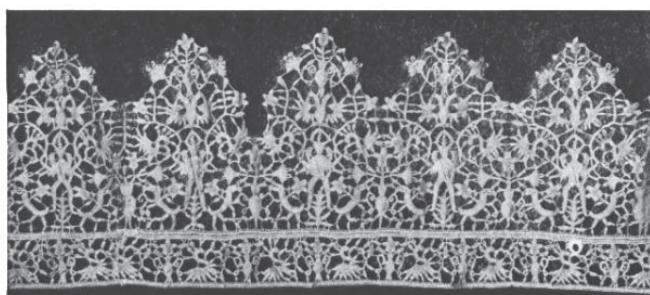
It is probable that their interest rested there, on the laces which circled their soft necks and white arms, nor looked to the history thereof—which was a pity.

its beginnings in Italy and Flanders in the early Sixteenth Century, through the Eighteenth century's offering of filmy mysteries. We are told of the early processes which took on more the nature of drawn-work than of lace, for they were elaborated from linen cloth,

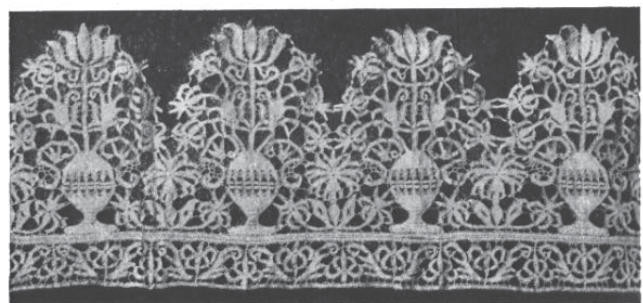
squares filled with stitchery. The foundation grew less and the lace-work more, until only the rectangularity of the design betrayed its origin.

Ambition took the lace-worker completely free from the foundation at last, and stitch

(Continued on page 452)



Punto in Aria with design of man and birds. Mrs. Dewitt Clinton Cohen



Punto in Aria, Italian 17th Century, owned by Mrs. McDougall Hawkes

Antique Laces of American Collectors

(Continued from page 414)

after stitch was built up with the lace-worker's needle until was composed the entrancing lace known as "stitches in the air"—*punto in aria*.

Miss Morris tells also of the Venetian point among the Italian laces, and of Burano, that lace of long ago, the making of which would have become a lost art—so one is told in Venice—save for the discovery at Chioggia a few years ago of a very old woman who in her childhood had been taught the fairy-like and complicated stitch. Queen Margherita, who fostered the lace industry, had the old stitch taught to new workers and now the work goes happily on, for millionaires, at Burano.

Side by side with the history of needle-point and reticella goes that of bobbin lace—perhaps it is the oldest type, as the fingers were used as anchors for the thread far back in the Middle Ages, when they called it *passement*. And those who like the origin of words smile when told that bobbin laces are called *merletti dei piombini* because the bobbins were made of lead (*piombo*).

Miss Morris has had wondrous opportunities for collecting illustrations for her splendid volume, as she is curator of textiles in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and is also the president of a choice group of art lovers who call themselves the Needle and Bobbin Club, while Miss Hague is vice-president.

The members already number two hundred and fifty enthusiasts who find in lace a beautiful exponent of the history of art and of mankind. The exhibition of their laces which was held last summer at the Metropolitan Museum created enormous interest, as well it might, for it comprised pieces of the greatest variety and beauty and historic value.

Mrs. J. Pierpont Morgan, Jr., exhibited among other varieties a flounce of Brussels lace made about 1790 which had as pattern a design by the great painter David, most exquisitely reproduced in needle-point with connecting tissue of the filmy net, for which this lace is celebrated.

APPEARING in the same exhibition and also illustrated in the lace book in detail was a benediction veil lent by Mrs. George J. Whelan. The design, in North Italian guipure of the late Seventeenth Century, follows evidently the painting of the Holy Family of Rubens to which it may be compared with interest. Among other members of the Needle and Bobbin Club who exhibited rare treasures were Mrs. Harris Fahnestock, Mrs. Joseph Pulitzer, Mrs. Robert W. De Forest, Mrs. Geo. T. Bliss, Mrs. Herbert L. Satterlee, Mrs. McDougall Hawkes, Mrs. Frederick B. Pratt, Mrs. Gino Speranza, Richard C. Greenleaf.

The literature of lace begins

with some choice and naive pattern books by an Italian lady whose name is Isabella Catanea Parasole, but which name suffered in euphony when changed into the Spanish form by her Lusitanian husband—Isabetta. Miss Morris treats of the lady most humanly in her book, and vivifies the work of four hundred years ago. The quaint volume of Signora Parasole is a conscientious affair of simple designs, reproductions of it available in art libraries. As a proof of the author's keen interest in life, Miss Morris has unearthed the fact that the pattern maker was also an expert worker in the gardens of Prince Cesi, and draws for us a picture of the lady amid the beauties of an Italian garden of the Renaissance full of sunshine and flowers, of singing birds and of cool cypress towers. And the flowers of the garden are woven into the patterns of lace by the far distant lady who found in nature her inspiration for art, as all must whose works endure.

It is interesting to know that this lace book is having a success in England as well as here, for it means that America and her scholars are looked upon abroad as a source of information.

LACES of Italy, those which originated there, all retain the strength that characterized the earliest examples. From reticella and cut work, through *punto in aria* to the superb *gros point de Venise*, the idea runs to accomplish an effect of richness. It remained for France and Belgium to compose with a different feeling, with extreme delicacy as the aim. This brought about the exquisite filmy compositions of the Eighteenth Century, wherein a delicate bobbin net supplied the background. On this net were thrown designs of lightest fancy, without the necessity of having the design form the fabric. Thus liberated from technical troubles, the worker's fancy created those filmy beauties of the Eighteenth Century which are classed as *point d'Argentin*, *Brussels*, *point d'Angleterre*. Even artists of note in that time of brilliance in design set their facile pencils to making patterns, so highly was the art of lace-making esteemed. And the ambition of the patient worker was inspired even to the point of copying in thread certain great works of art. To the court painter David is accredited the design of a Brussels lace flounce owned by Mrs. J. Pierpont Morgan, Jr., the floral detail around the classic figures being from the brain of Pillement.

The plates which illustrate this brief review are from the book, where they are given in nearly life size and are reproduced with a clarity that makes every stitch discernible. The book is published for the Needle and Bobbin Club by William Helbrun, Inc.