



**Alençon      Part II.      By M. Jourdain**

It was in 1675, also, that the name of Point de France began to be confined to Point d'Alençon; no doubt as the most important of the French fabrics.\* Point d'Alençon is made by hand, with a fine needle, upon a parchment pattern. The parchment was originally used in its natural colour, but before 1769 green parchment had been adopted, as it is mentioned in an inventory of that date.† The worker is better able to detect any faults in her work upon a coloured ground than upon white. The paper pattern is laid upon the strip of parchment, which rests on a pillow, and the outlines of the ornament are pricked with a needle. After pricking, the parchment is given to a "traceuse,"

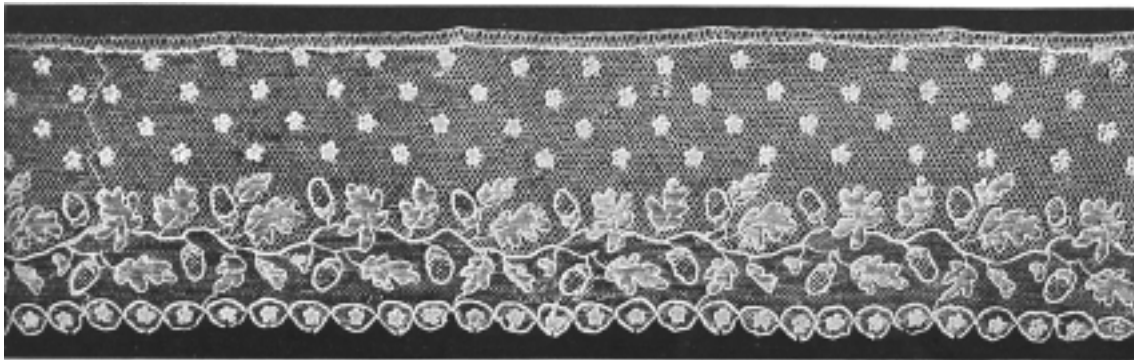
who first sews it to a piece of very coarse linen folded double, then forms the outline of the pattern by two threads ‡ which are guided along the edge by the thumb of the left hand, and fixed by minute stitches passed with another needle and thread, through the holes of the parchment. The "Picage" and the "Trace" date in Alençon from the first imitation of Points de Venise. The next process, the making of the "Fond" or "Entoilage," § employs exactly the same stitch which was used for the *mat* of point coupé and for the "flowers" of Point de Venise. The worker works the button-hole

‡ "D'abord on se servit de deux fils doubles ce qui arrive quelquefois obtenir une trace solide." (*Ibid.*)

§ "Les brides étants presque nulles, on commençait ordinairement un morceau par les motifs. C'est pour cette raison que ce point porta dès l'origine le nom de *fond*, nom qui aurait dû appartenir aux brides et plus tard au *réseau*. Il conserva cependant ce nom de *fond*, et de nos jours il sort encore à désigner le *mat* des fleurs, feuilles, ou autres ornements réservés à cet effet."—*Histoire du Point Alençon*.

\* "Après la dissolution de cette société (1675) le nom de point de France fut donné au point d'Alençon. Ce nom était aussi souvent usité dans les actes que ceux de vélin et de point d'Alençon, et ces trois noms ont été employés concurremment jusqu'à nos jours."—*Histoire du Point d'Alençon*.

† The Inventory of Simon Geslin, April 13th, 1769. (*Ibid.*)



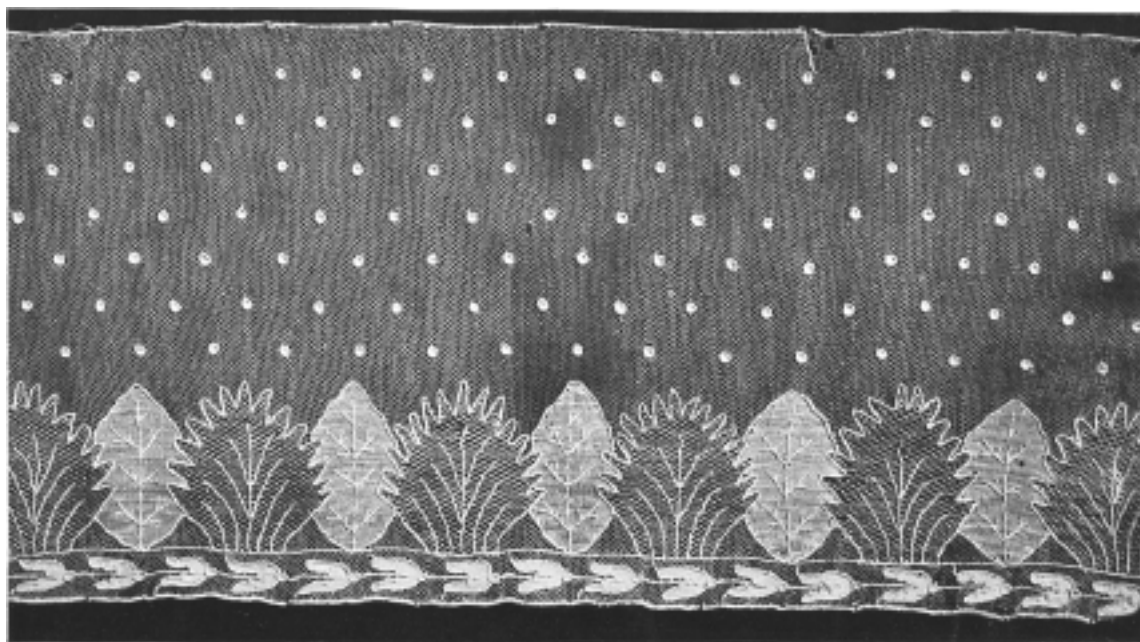
## The Connoisseur

stitch (*point bouclé* or *de boutonnière*, not, as is stated in so many authors, *point noué*) from left to right, and when arrived at the end of the row, the thread is thrown back to the point of departure, and she works again from left to right over the thread. Occasionally small pin-holes (*portes*) or a diaper pattern of pin-holes (*quadrilles*) were let into the "fond." A more open variety of the "Fond" is the *rempli*,\* formed by twisting the thread before making the loop, and these two processes were at first executed by the same worker.

The brides of Alençon are of three sorts: the *bride à picots*, the *bride bouclée*, and the *bride*

the mesh is covered with a thread twisted round it, and held in place by a button-hole stitch at each angle.‡

The *réseau* is worked from left to right, *au point bouclé et tortillé*, with the thread attached to the outline of the flowers and ornaments.§ It began to be made at Alençon about 1700, as Madame Despierres proves|| from various inventories, and not as Mrs. Palliser and M. Séguin assert, in 1741 at the earliest. The *modes* are made, like reticella, upon skeleton foundations of thread, which are afterwards covered with button-hole stitches, and were introduced, when the *réseau* was used, to give



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*tortillée*. The first—the *bride à picots*—had, in later Point de Venise, shown a tendency to approximate to a regular, generally hexagonal, mesh. These brides in Alençon were not marked upon the parchment until the reign of Louis XVI., and were made at sight;† and towards the middle of the reign of Louis XIV. the meshes show an exact hexagonal form. It will be remembered that in 1673 the "Nouveau point de Paris" is described in the *Mercur* as covered with "an infinite number of small picots." The *Bride bouclée sans nez*, also an hexagonal mesh, has no picots, and was invented about 1700. In the *Bride tortillée*

an open and clear effect to certain portions of the design. The first *modes* were varieties of the *brides à picots*, and zig-zag bars picoté (Les Venises). Then followed *des O à nez en queue*, *des écailles*, *des Mosaïques*, *des Rateaux*, *des O en cheinettés*, *des O boucles en queue*, *Mouches*, *Rangs blancs*, *O encadrés*,

‡ "On plaçait autrefois une épingle au haut de chaque hexagone, afin d'obtenir une tension pour la forme régulière de la maille, lorsque l'on se servait d'épingles, elle s'appelait *bride ébinglée*."—*Histoire du Point d'Alençon*.

§ There are several varieties of *réseau*—*le réseau ordinaire*, *le petit réseau*, *le réseau mouché*, *le réseau avec bobine*, *le grand réseau*.

|| "Le *réseau* se fait dans le sens du pied de la dentelle à son bord, par rangs de gauche à droite, au point bouclé et tortillé peu serré. Lorsque le rang est fini on revient en passant trois fois son aiguille dans chaque maille, et l'on recommence la deuxième rang de la même manière."—*Histoire du Point d'Alençon*.

\* The "rempli" is found in *point coupé*, and used as contrast to the "fond," employed for closer effect.

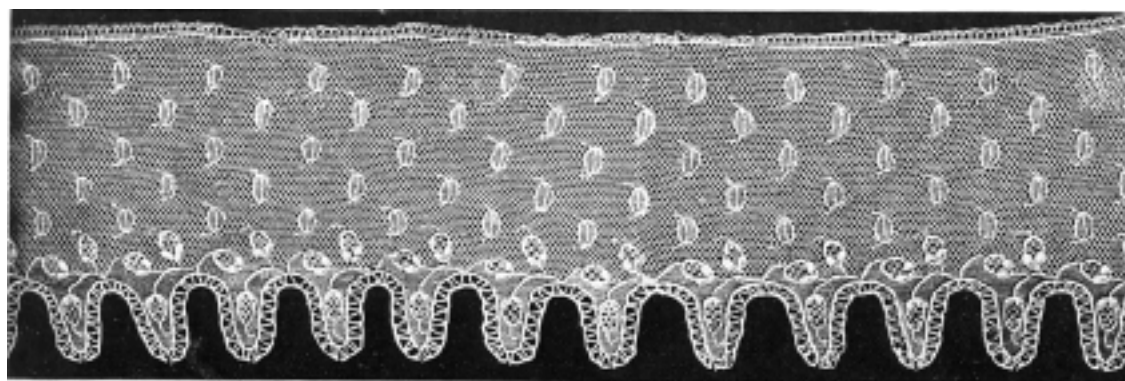
† *Histoire du Point d'Alençon*.

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*Boulettes, O à huit pattes, O à nez en chainettes, X en chainettes, Pavés avec cannetille* (a small form suspended within a hexagon, a variety of the réseau rosacé), *St. Esprit avec rangs clairs, St. Esprit à six branches, St. Esprit avec gaze ordinaire* (various star devices), *Couronne d'O à nez, Couronne d'O bouclés* (a circle of small circles ornamented with picots), *Étoile à double nez* (a star picoté). The *modes* of Alençon, though very light and open and effective, are not so rich and varied as those in Venise à réseau, or Brussels lace. Indeed, in 1761, a writer, describing the Point de France, says that it does not arrive at the taste and delicacy of Brussels, and that the *modes* are inferior, and consequently much point is sent from Alençon to Brussels to have the *modes* added; but connoisseurs, he adds, easily

cast over a thread, which outlines various forms in the design—a distinctive mark of Point d'Alençon. In general the works distinguished as Point d'Alençon, Point d'Argentan, and Argentella|| have so many characteristics in common that it would be preferable to call them Alençon à réseau, Alençon à grandes brides, and Alençon à réseau rosacé.

"*La Brode*,"¶ the next process, is worked in button-hole stitch, and gives relief to the design in the veining of the leaves, the stalks of the flowers, etc. The "brode" is borrowed by Alençon from raised Venetian point, but the relief is much lower in the French "brode." To obtain the raised effect, a pad of coarse thread was laid down, and upon these very close button-hole stitches were worked. When this is completed, the threads which unite



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detect the difference.\* A favourite *mode* is the square trellis foundation, ornamented with squares and circles at the points of intersection. Zig-zag lines finely picoté are also used with effect. One of the *modes*, which consists of a button-hole stitched solid hexagon within a skeleton hexagon,† and connected with the surrounding figure by means of six small ties or brides, is sometimes used extensively to form a groundwork, when it has been named by M. Dupont Auberville, "réseau rosacé" (Argentella). This "Argentella" was supposed by Mrs. Palliser to be of Genoese‡ workmanship, but it has no affinities with the type of lace made in Genoa, while its character and the style of the floral patterns are those of Alençon. Its cordonnet§ is sometimes done in button-hole stitches closely

lace, parchment, and linen are cut by a sharp razor passed between the two folds of linen; the loose threads are removed (*Enlevage* and *Eboutage*) and the *regaleuse* repairs any small defects, and there remains one last process,\*\* that of uniting all the segments of lace imperceptibly together, or the "*Assemblage*." The seam follows as much as possible the outlines of the pattern. When

|| Its technicalities, according to Mr. A. S. Cole, resemble those of the delicate and latest Venetian laces. "The work may have been made in Italy, but the name would appear to be an Italianized rendering of Argentan; and it is just as likely that some of the Venetians working as soon at Argentan as others were at Alençon, made the Argentella lace."

¶ "*La brodeuse*. . . attache à sa ceinture un fil appelé *menu* ou fil conducteur, puis elle attache un autre fil à la trace. Elle fait sur le menu trois ou quatre points bouclés, fiche son aiguille dans la trace en faisant le quatrième ou le cinquième point, et continue, en procédant toujours de la même manière." — *Histoire du Point d'Alençon*.

\*\* "*L'Assemblage* consiste à raccorder les dessins, à les unir par une couture, quand c'est une fleur. Lorsqu'il s'agit du champ, soit de beude, soit de réseau, on refait les mailles, afin que l'assemblage ne paraisse pas. C'est toujours une ouvrière habile que l'on choisit pour ce travail. L'assembluse doit connaître tous les points."

\* *Dictionnaire du Citoyen*. Paris, 1761.

† It is sometimes set within a square.

‡ "Formerly much of it was to be met with in the curiosity shops of that city." (Mrs. Palliser, 1864.)

§ The cordonnet is also of stout thread.

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finished, a steel instrument, the *aficot*,\* was passed into each flower to polish it and remove any inequalities on its surface.†

In Point d'Alençon, horsehair was introduced to give firmness and consistency to the *cordonné* in the later period of Louis XV., and during the reign of Louis XVI. It has been objected‡ that this *cordonné* thickens when put into water, and that the horsehair edge draws up the flower from the ground and makes it rigid and heavy. It was this solidity of Alençon, and of the still heavier Argentan, which caused them to be known as “*Dentelles d'hiver*.”§ According to Peuchet, it was only worn in the winter, though at that date it was sufficiently light in design.

In 1836, Baron Mercier, thinking by producing it at a lower price to procure a more favourable

sale, set up a lace school, and caused the girls to work the patterns on bobbin net, as bearing some resemblance to the old “*point de bride*,” but fashion did not favour “*point de bride*,” so the plan failed. The only important modern innovator in workmanship was the introduction of “*shading*” on the flowers by *M. Beaumé*|| in 1855. Shaded tints were brought in tentatively by *M. Larnaz Triboult*, and in a book of patterns for *point* made between 1811 and 1814, certain leaves were marked to be shaded. This effect is made by varying the application of the two stitches used in making the flowers—the *toilé* which forms the close tissue, and the *grillé*, the more open part of the pattern. This system has been adopted in France, Belgium, and England, but with most success in France. The thread from which Alençon was made was spun at Lille,¶ and also at Mechlin and Nouvion.\*\*

\* *L'afficage* is not included in the operations.

† There are therefore 12 processes, including the design. These can be subdivided into 20 or 22.

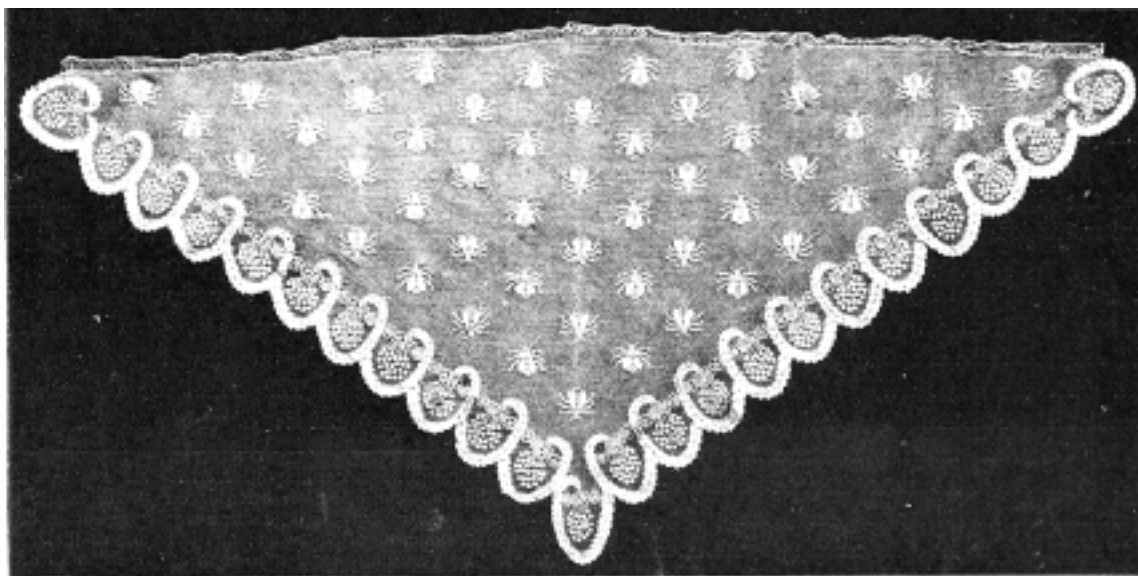
‡ *Dictionnaire du Citoyen*. Paris, 1761.

§ “Déjà, sous Louis XV., le *point d'Alençon* et le *point d'Argentan* étaient désignés par l'étiquette come ‘*dentelles d'hiver*.’”—*L'Art dans la Parure*. C. Blanc.

|| Mrs. Palliser, *History of Lace*.

¶ “La fabrique de Lille fournit les fils pour le travail du *point*. Ils sont plus fins et plus retors que les fils destinés à la plus fine dentelle.—Peuchet.

\*\* *Histoire du Point d'Alençon*.



ALENÇON (EMPIRE), THE GROUND POWDERED WITH BEES

SAID TO HAVE BELONGED TO THE  
EMPERESS MARIE LOUISE, ABOUT 1810

VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM