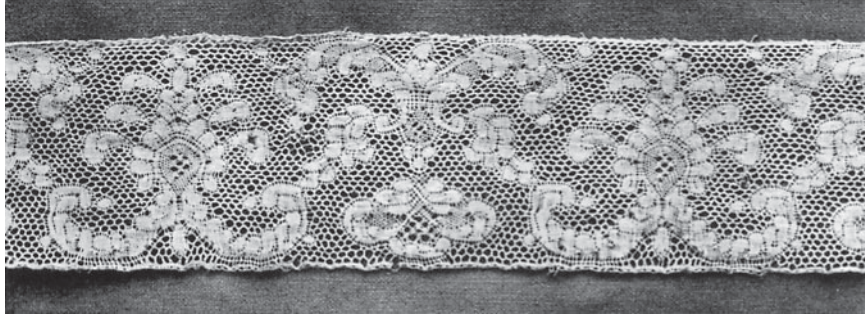


I

II

VALENCIENNES AND BINCHE, EARLY 18TH CENTURY  
FROM THE COLLECTION OF MRS. HARRIS FAHNESTOCK



VALENCIENNES, EARLY 18TH CENTURY  
FROM THE COLLECTION OF MISS GERTRUDE WHITING

## THE EXHIBITION OF BINCHE AND VALENCIENNES LACES

ON March 28th the Club opened its first exhibit, a collection of Valenciennes and Binche laces lent by the members and their friends. The exhibition was held in the Arden Galleries, which had been graciously tendered the Club for its initial venture, and covered a period of one week, closing on April 4th.

Upon entering the room the attention of the visitor was at once arrested by the glance of a demure little Dutch maiden, a delightful Cuyp masterpiece lent for the occasion by Mr. Thatcher Adams. This dainty little lady with her lace-trimmed linen collar and cuffs, looking out from her frame with a friendly welcome for all, served admirably to illustrate the Binche fabric displayed in the adjacent cases in its native environment; while the introduction of Dutch flowers and a large copper bowl of fruit placed on a long oaken table in the centre of the room created a pleasingly sympathetic note in the general scheme of decoration.

Passing to the exquisite fabrics that had been assembled in this picturesque setting by the members and their friends, one could not but be impressed by the charming way in which the two native elements, Netherlandish and French, found expression; on the one hand the brush of Albert Cuyp reflected delightfully the temperament of a stolid people whose patience could produce such masterpieces of delicate threadwork, while the decorative French panels,<sup>1</sup> displayed on the opposite wall, portrayed quite as clearly a lighter element, which combined a delicacy

<sup>1</sup> Lent by the courtesy of the Arden Studios.

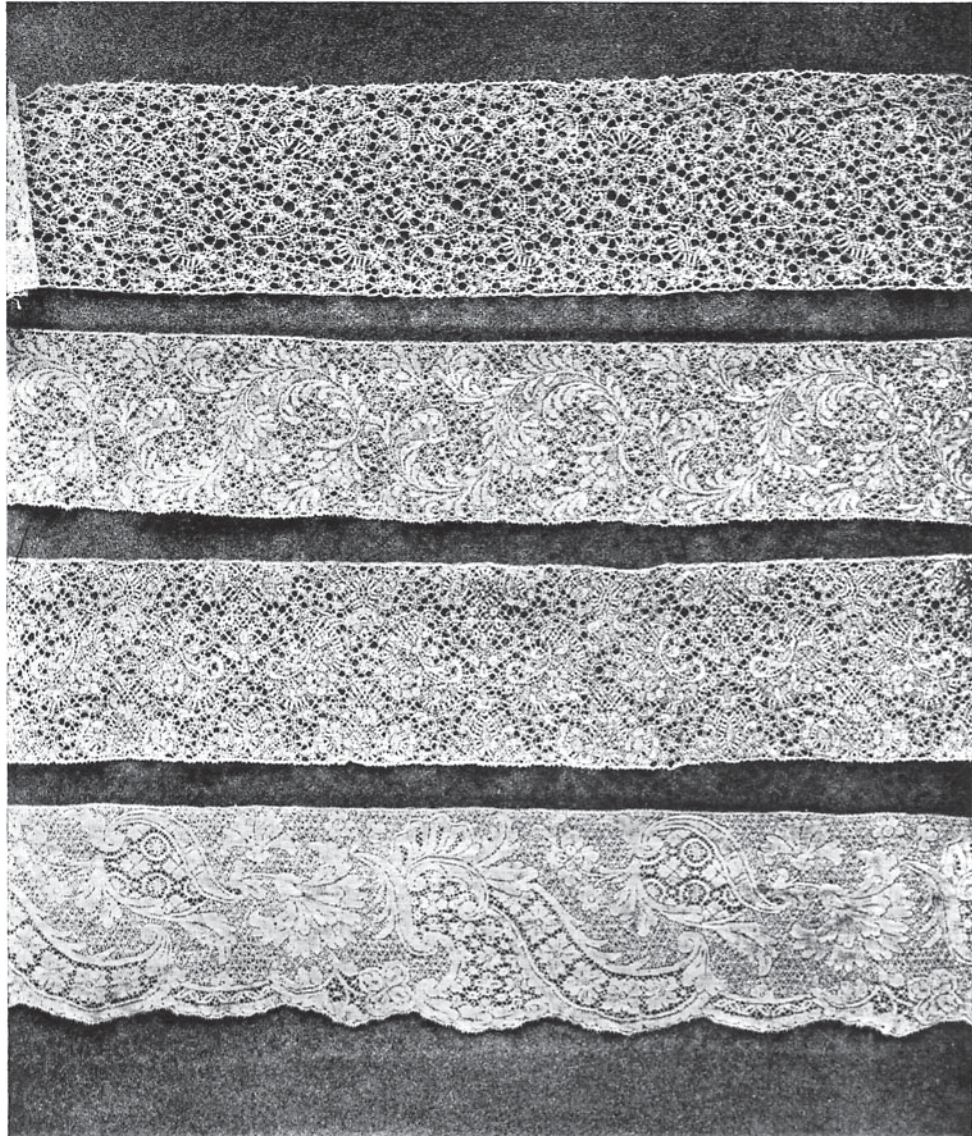
of touch with a charm and gaiety quite foreign to the Netherlandish people. Thus we find in the intermingling of these two peoples, occasioned then as now by the exigencies of war, the evolution of an art that produced a fabric the beauty of which has never been surpassed.

In the arrangement of the laces a more or less chronological sequence was followed; the Binche and the Valenciennes, early and modern, occupied three large table cases, while larger pieces were displayed in three upright wall cases and two central vitrines.

The collection itself was a notable one, made up as it was from the laces of a score or more of private collectors and connoisseurs; it proved not only a source of pleasure to the many casual visitors, but was of educational interest to all who viewed it from the standpoint of the student; for the grouping of the different types enabled one to note distinctly the marked characteristics of the two fabrics, the similarity of which often proves confusing to the novice.

So far as can be determined the Binche and Valenciennes fabrics, like most of the exquisite pillow work found in the different lace centers, developed naturally from the simple bobbin lace still found on peasant caps in the Netherlands. That is, a lace utterly devoid of pattern and best described as a web of irregularly placed threads. This, in the late seventeenth century, developed into the type illustrated in No. 1 on (plate 2) a lace which is also said to be the prototype of Mechlin lace, when in its delicate meshes the point d'esprit stitch is introduced—a stitch that forms a minute checkered pattern with alternate squares worked solid—traces of which are found in Nos. 1 and 2 of this plate, where four interesting pieces have been introduced to show the different periods of design.

By studying these one finds that the pattern as it gradually emerges is woven in a cloth stitch, the "toilé," in which the threads are interlaced as in a linen handkerchief, while the ground continues irregular with perhaps the introduction of occasional minute circles which in time take on the form of stars or snow crystals—the "fond de neige" of pure Binche. When, as in the finest examples the designer combines the plumed leaf form so popular in Flemish patterns, the result is an exquisite thread tracery that can be likened to nothing other than the delicate window frost-work on a wintry morning.



BINCHE

LATE 17TH AND EARLY 18TH CENTURY

- I FROM THE COLLECTION OF MISS MARY PARSONS
- II FROM THE COLLECTION OF MRS. DE WITT C. COHEN
- III FROM THE COLLECTION OF MRS. DE WITT C. COHEN
- IV FROM THE COLLECTION OF MRS. EDWARD ROBINSON

Both Binche and Valenciennes are made by the twisting and plaiting of continuous threads of uniform size; that is, the ground, mesh or "fond" is worked at the same time as the pattern, and the lace, when completed, is a perfectly flat fabric without the slightest trace of relief, such as is indicated by the heavier thread that outlines the pattern in the "trolle kant" or Mechlin laces.

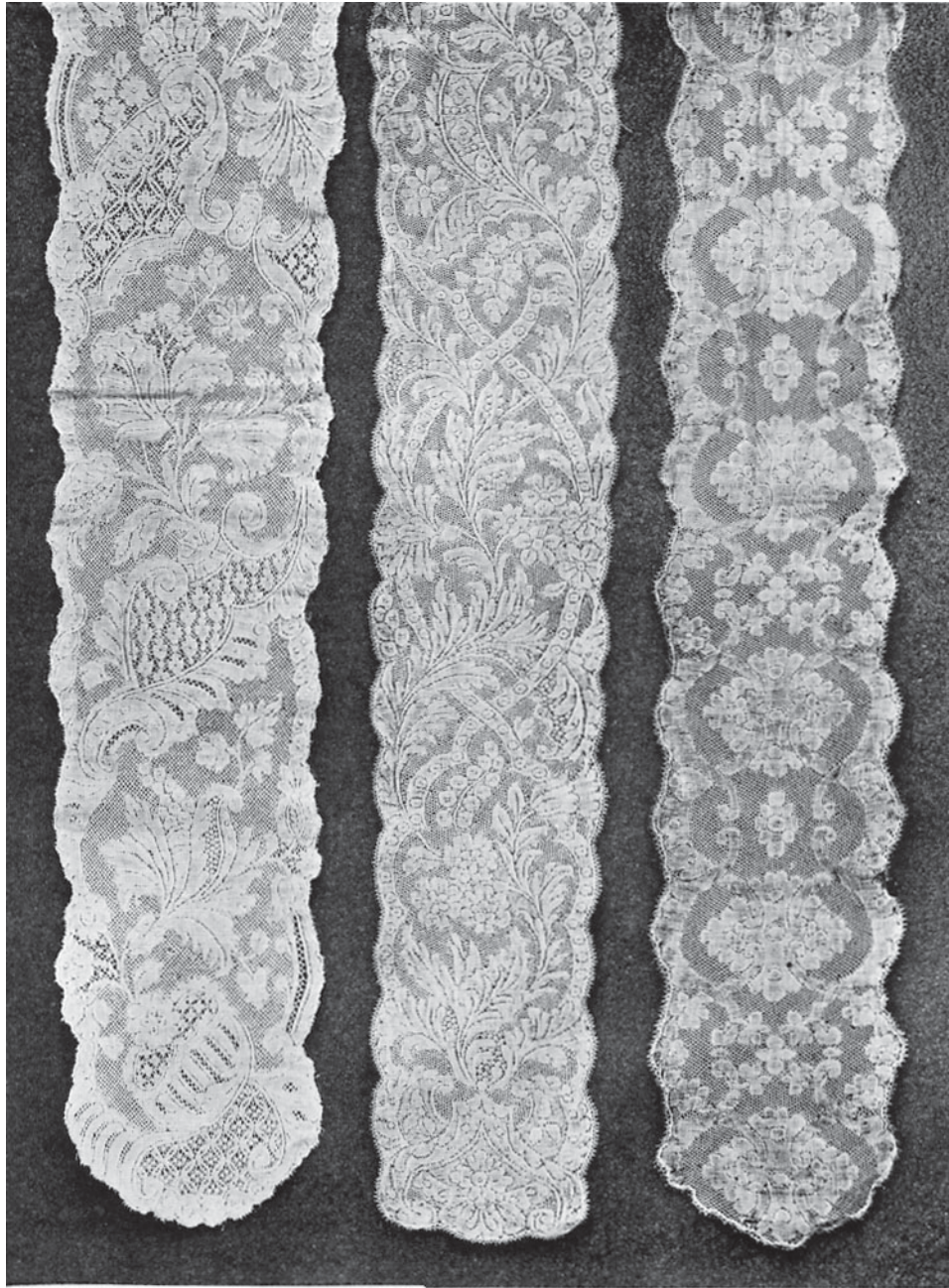
Much of the modern Valenciennes is the work of aged dentelières housed in the Beguinages of Belgium, the industry having long since ceased to exist in its native town. Many cottagers also eked out a scanty livelihood by supplying "Val" edgings to the trade prior to the outbreak of hostilities; and the miserable pittance<sup>2</sup> earned by their patient labor, recorded in the statistics furnished by Madam Van Schelle, is almost unbelievable.

While in the early Valenciennes lace the pattern often resembles very closely those of the Binche and Mechlin laces, the distinguishing feature of the former is that, as above stated, there is no outlining thread as in the Mechlin, and that while the ground in the Binche is almost without exception of the "fond de neige," in the so-called Valenciennes it is worked in a five-holed mesh called "maille à cinq trous" or "fond à la vierge."<sup>3</sup> This distinction is clearly marked in the two beautiful strips lent by Mrs. Harris Fahnestock and illustrated in the frontispiece; the Binche (No. 2) having the "fond de neige" grounding, the other—the early Valenciennes (No. 1)—the "fond à la vierge," with only occasional jours in the pattern of the "fond de neige."

The barbe or lappet, so popular in the eighteenth century, is represented by six very beautiful specimens of the best period shown on plates Nos. 3 and 4. The Valenciennes fabric, produced toward the end of the reign of Louis XV, is without equal both as to pattern and technique. In the lace of this period the "toilé" is like the finest handkerchief, and the patterns, furnished by court designers, are of exquisite beauty.

<sup>2</sup> See page 19.

<sup>3</sup> Many examples of this lace are preserved in the Danish Kunstindustrimuseum at Copenhagen, where they are catalogued as "Tondern Binche." Tondern is a town in the German province of Schleswig-Holstein. Cf. "Tonderske Kniplinger det Danske Kunstindustrimuseums Udstilling," 1908, by Emil Hannover. Cf. also "Les Industries à Domicile en Belgique," by Pierre Verhaegen, 1902.



I

II

III

VALENCIENNES LAPPETS

- I FROM THE COLLECTION OF MR. RICHARD GREENLEAF
- II FROM THE COLLECTION OF MRS. HARRIS FAHNESTOCK
- III FROM THE COLLECTION OF MRS. HARRIS FAHNESTOCK

In the eighteenth century a lady's head-dress was made up of a pair of lappets such as these—the “barbes pleines,” about a yard of narrow lace called the “papillon,” and the crown of the cap—the “fond de bonnet,”<sup>4</sup> an outfit that cost anywhere from one to twenty-four thousand livres, that is, from about two hundred to two thousand four hundred dollars, a price far in advance of the modern auction-room figures.

A very beautiful lappet is that shown on plate 4, lent by Mrs. McDougall Hawkes. This is of exquisite technique and has in its design the elaborately plumed cock, familiar in decorative work of the period. Equally interesting are those lent by Mrs. Fahnestock, plate 3, Mrs. Blumenthal, plate 4, and Mr. Greenleaf, plate 3, illustrating as they do an interesting variation in pattern, some with rococo banding, others of the earlier type showing many different “jours” in the intricacies of the weave. In most of these we have in the field of the pattern the five-holed mesh, which, toward the end of the century, was supplanted by the “maille ronde” or round mesh shown in the charming strip lent by Mrs. Gerry, plate 5 (No. 1). This, with its vining pattern and scattered sprig of carnations, is a typical example of the Louis XVI Valenciennes, while No. 2, on the same plate, lent by Mrs. J. P. Morgan, shows a still later eighteenth-century type of pattern with the clear-cut square mesh. The general adoption of the square mesh in the early years of the nineteenth century marked the gradual decline of the art; the abandonment of the more difficult technique, the deterioration in pattern, all foreshadowing the commercialism of an age in which power-driven machinery and modern methods swept aside the craft of the painstaking artist and artisan.

Valenciennes, however, unlike many other lace fabrics, has always held its own in the marts of fashion and has survived the vagaries of an ever-changing mode. Thus, in the mid-Victorian era we find the French industry still producing beautiful work such as is shown in the strip lent by Mrs. Henderson, plate 5 (No. 3), a piece that was awarded the first prize at the Paris Exposition in 1868. Another interesting piece of fine quality, of which, unfortunately, there is no illustration, was a strip of honeysuckle pattern exhibited by Mrs. William H. Bliss; this lace, made some twenty years ago by the finest Valenciennes worker available in

<sup>4</sup>A set of these may be seen in the Museum exhibit.



I

II

III

VALENCIENNES LAPPETS

- I COLLECTION OF MRS. MC DOUGALL HAWKES
- II COLLECTION OF MRS. GEORGE BLUMENTHAL
- III COLLECTION OF MRS. MC DOUGALL HAWKES

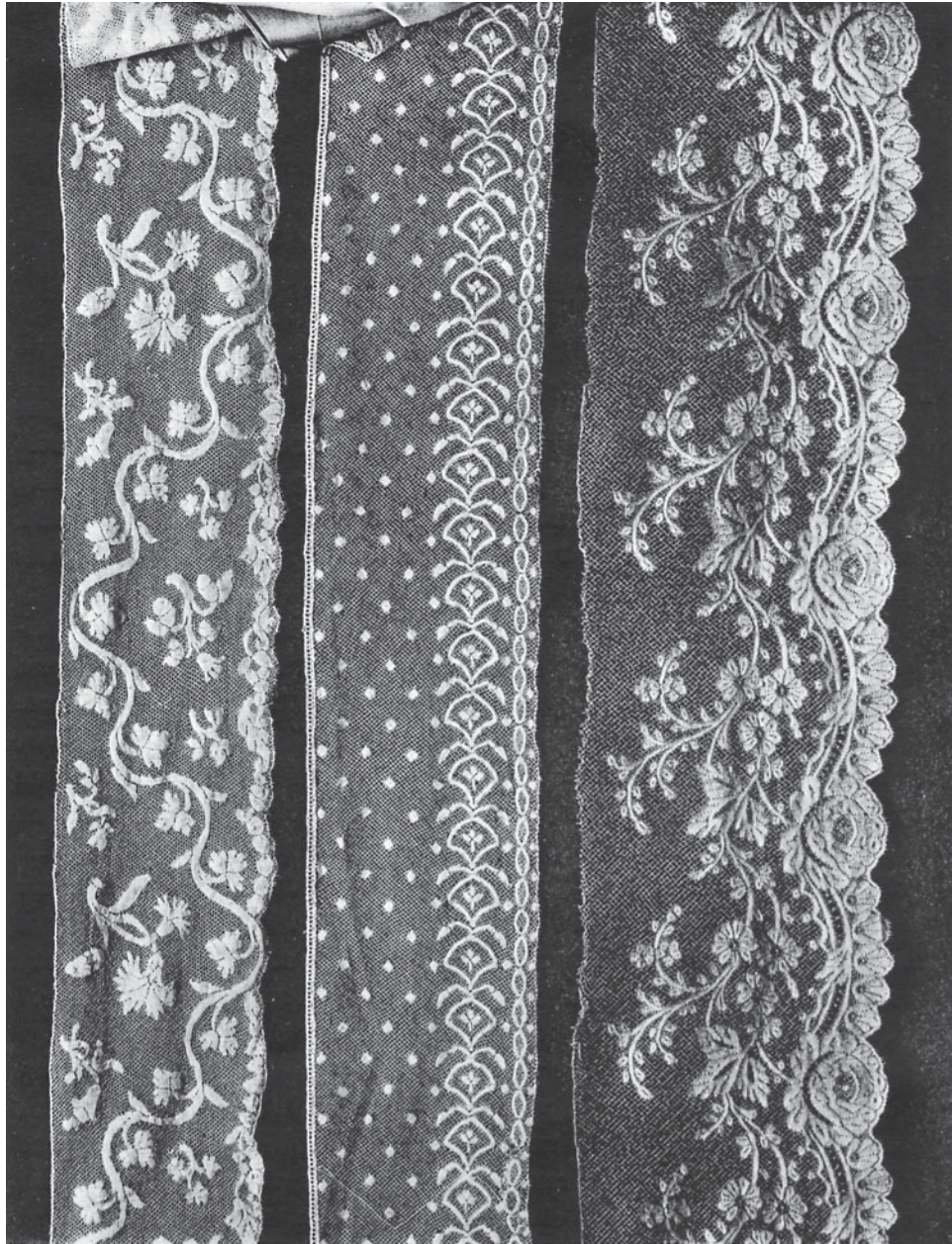


Paris, a woman eighty-odd years, required over six hundred bobbins to weave the pattern, which had been specially designed from a bit of old French brocade. Displayed in the same case with this were some of the interesting bobbins from Mrs. DeWitt Clinton Cohen's collection, which were illustrated in the December Bulletin. The most elaborate example of modern work, however, was a shawl, also lent by Mrs. Bliss, unique in that the Valenciennes is usually made in narrow flouncing and edging and seldom if ever worked on so large a scale—the design was of the same general floral character found in Brussels and Chantilly shawls—having for its principal motif the lily. This was exhibited in one of the standing wall cases, while two bedspreads of exquisitely fine embroidery and Valenciennes lace, lent by Mrs. William M. Kingsland, occupied wall cases at either end of the room.

Encouraged by the cordial coöperation of the members and their friends, the committee is looking forward to arranging several exhibits during the coming winter that will comprise not only lace, but as well embroidery and weaving.

Among those who contributed toward making the exhibit a success were the following: Mr. Thatcher Adams, Mrs. Charles B. Alexander, Miss Averill, Mrs. George T. Bliss, Mrs. Wm. H. Bliss, Mrs. Wm. T. Blodgett, Miss Blodgett, Mrs. George Blumenthal, Miss Carpenter, Mrs. DeWitt Clinton Cohen, Mrs. George Wm. Douglas, Mrs. Wm. Stuart Edgar, Mrs. Harris Fahnestock, Mrs. Robert L. Gerry, Mr. Richard C. Greenleaf, Mrs. McDougall Hawkes, Mrs. Harold G. Henderson, Mrs. Wm. M. Kingsland, Miss Kohlsaas, Mrs. John Pierpont Morgan, The Misses Newbold, Mrs. Leonard E. Opdycke, Miss Parsons, Mrs. Frederick B. Pratt, Mrs. Edward Robinson, Mrs. J. West Roosevelt, Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Mrs. James Speyer, Mrs. Benjamin Stern, Mrs. Stanford White, Miss Gertrude Whiting.

FRANCES MORRIS.



I

II

III

VALENCIENNES

- I FROM THE COLLECTION OF MRS. R. L. GERRY
- II FROM THE COLLECTION OF MRS. J. P. MORGAN
- III FROM THE COLLECTION OF MRS. HAROLD HENDERSON