



MECHLIN LACE, EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

## SOME LACES WITH HUNTING SUBJECTS

BY MARIAN HAGUE

**T**HE Chase has always been a popular subject in ornament, and the glamour which surrounds it goes back at least as far as the days of the cavemen, when they scratched reindeer and bison on the walls of their habitations. It has gone through many "renderings," since those times, and workers of all nationalities and epochs have tried their hands at celebrating the joys and prowess of the huntsman. Among secular subjects it has shared the honors with Love and War. Quite naturally the lace-designer has not overlooked its possibilities, and there are many examples both in museums and private collections with figures of hunters and animals. It may be interesting to the readers of the *BULLETIN* to see the reproductions of two pieces with such subjects owned by members of the Needle and Bobbin Club.

The upper piece in our illustration is of Milanese bobbin lace,<sup>1</sup> and shows two hunters, with spears, dogs and birds, placed on a pattern of branching scrollwork with conventionalized flower forms and pomegranates held together by bowknots. The piece is evidently not in its original form, but the men's figures are well drawn and the eager dogs are very natural. The dress of the huntsmen would seem to place them rather before the middle of the seventeenth century, but the mesh ground and the form of the scrolling branches suggest a later date. Perhaps the design for the figures was one that had been kept for many years and which the workers used in preference to evolving new patterns. In Signora Ricci's

<sup>1</sup>From the collection of Mrs. Gino Speranza.

volume on Italian bobbin laces are two plates with hunters (Nos. 242 and 256), both of Milanese lace. The latter is a border for an alb and was probably made in the early part of the eighteenth century, but in this, as in the piece in our illustration, the costume of the hunters seems to be of an earlier period.

The second piece is made of that combination of tape and needlepoint which the Italians called *mezzo punto* or *punto di Venezia col nastrino*, that is, Venetian tape guipure.<sup>2</sup> While the work is exactly the same as that of the mid-Victorian horror known as "Renaissance lace," it is redeemed by a masterly sense of drawing and an expertness of technique that set an excellent example to our modern workers.

The hunters and their dogs, the eagles, and even the two humble rabbits are full of dash and animation, and the hand that drew the pattern for the worker was trained and sure. The tape is used skilfully and its presence is more or less disguised by adding rows of plain needle-made filling here and there to widen the solid white and to keep the lines from being too monotonous. (The monotony of the heavy line of tape is usually the characteristic by which a piece of *mezzo punto* is recognizable at first sight.) There are the various fillings that are usually found in Venetian point, amounting to about a dozen different styles. The design is connected by "brides," plain and picotées, and the curves of the scrolls and flowers are thickly padded and decorated with the little loops and picots after the usual manner.

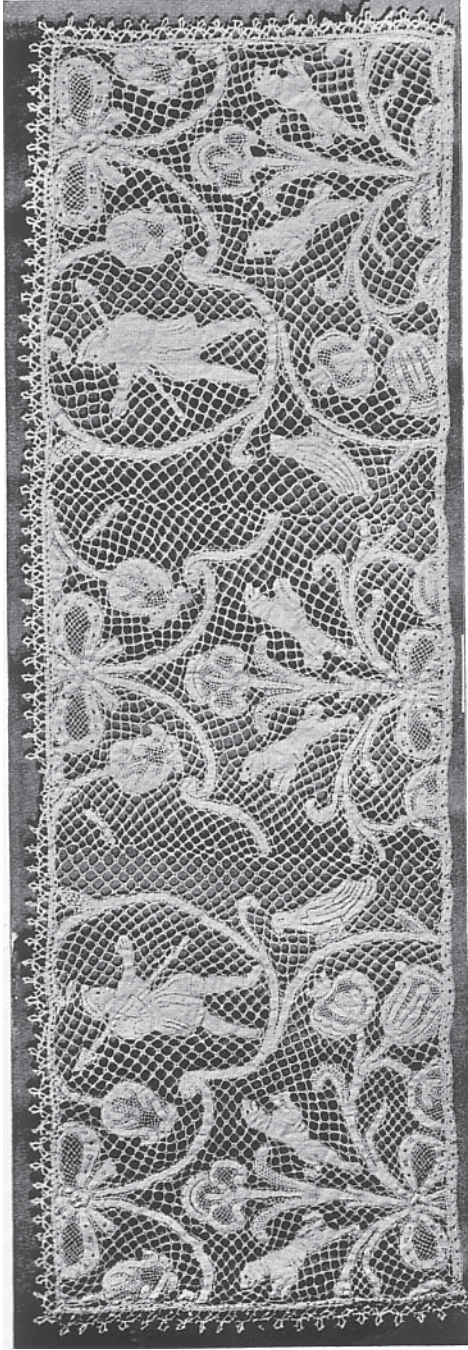
The costumes of the huntsmen seem to date the piece in the second half of the seventeenth century, probably between 1660 and 1680, with the pseudo-classic touch in the tunic (like the "Rhingrave" of the French fashion of that time) and buskins, and they remind one of the ballets in the plays of Molière and the pageants of the court of Louis XIV.

The two lions ramping at each other in the middle of the composition immediately suggest the idea of heraldry, but the large flower forms that come between them in the place where one would expect a coat-of-arms seem to be quite innocent of any such intention.

It is difficult to tell for what purpose this piece of lace may have been made. Although the pattern is complete, the ends have been cut showing that the piece was formerly longer, so that it may have been part of a

<sup>2</sup> From the collection of M. H.





VENETIAN TAPE GUIPURE, MEZZO PUNTO OR PUNTO DI VENEZIA COL NASTRINO  
SECOND HALF OF SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

border for an alb or perhaps for a tablecloth. Many of the pieces of Milanese lace with hunters are for albs or church use, in spite of what would seem to us an incongruity between the use to which the lace was put and the subject of the design.

A charming cape of needlepoint of the time of Louis XV, showing hunters, stags and dogs, is illustrated in Miss Margaret Taylor Johnstone's translation of "Les Points de France" by E. Lefèbure (Plate XIX), and in Miss Jourdain's book on "Old Lace" are several plates which connect themselves with our subject. Plate LII represents a very beautiful cravat of Brussels lace of the eighteenth century in which the design, the workmanship and the purpose of the lace seem to make a particularly happy combination. It seems difficult to imagine that such cravats were worn by the young nobles not only at court and for hunting, but also when they went "to the wars." It was indeed *La Guerre en Dentelles* in those days.

The two pieces of lace belonging to the Metropolitan Museum, which are the head and tail-pieces of these notes, seem to have been made to outline the necks of ladies' dresses and form the "engaging" ruffles at their elbows, as we see them in the portraits of the time of Nattier and Watteau, when Alençon was a "winter lace" and Mechlin was considered more appropriate for summer wear. The head-piece is a delightful bit of Mechlin, the tail-piece a charming strip of point d'Angleterre having for its subject Diana, the goddess of the hunt, with her dogs.



POINT D'ANGLETERRE, PERIOD LOUIS XV