

OUTLINED PUSHER LACE WITH DANCING FIGURES
FROM THE COLLECTION OF MISS GERTRUDE WHITING

PUSHER LACE

AN EARLY MACHINE-MADE FABRIC

BY ABBIE C. MAHIN

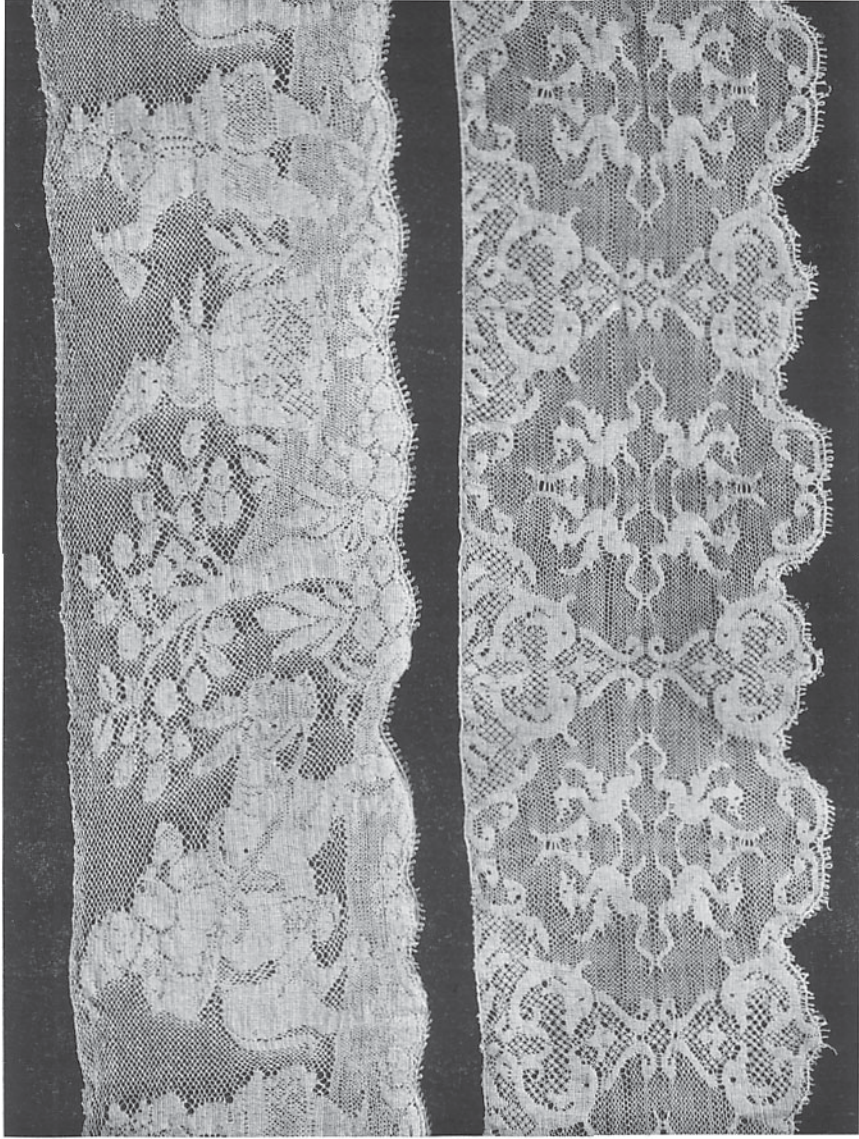
THE machine patented by Mr. John Heathcoat and Mr. Lacey, about 1809, was the invention by Heathcoat which first produced a net by mechanical means, with a regular and non-slipping mesh. It made plain net only, without pattern, so that, if a design was required, it had to be "needle run"; that is, the plain net was stretched on a frame, and the design worked on it by needle and thread.

In the year 1812 a machine was constructed by Samuel Clark and James Mart (not Martin), which not only produced net, but was capable of working a pattern upon it at the same time. The design, however, was flat and shadowy, and, to be made properly effective, required to be needle-run or outlined with a thread by hand-workers. It was called the Pusher machine, because every bobbin and carriage could be operated by an independent pusher just as wanted, and could work in any required direction or remain motionless as necessary. This enabled the producer to vary designs and styles to an almost unlimited extent. The machine, however, was a costly and delicate one to work, and as the bob-



PUSHER LACE CAPE

FROM THE COLLECTION OF MRS. FRANK W. MAHIN



PUSHER LACE FROM THE COLLECTION IN THE METROPOLITAN
MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK CITY

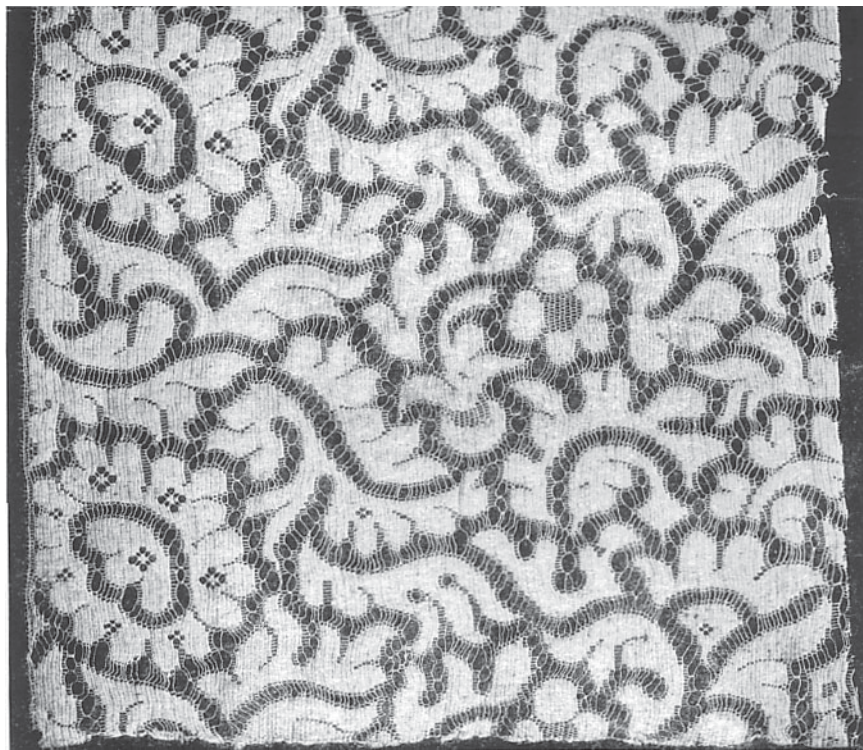
bins were small and carried little thread, the "webs" were necessarily quite short. This, together with slow working, made production very small. These factors rendered the machine only suitable for expensive and high grade goods, particularly for articles which could be made complete in themselves, such as scarfs, capes, shawls, and lappets. Each web seems to have produced a piece of lace only about two yards wide by four yards long; equal to two shawls, each two yards square. It can, therefore, readily be seen that although lace could be, and was, made in length, the breadths were so short as to be nearly useless. Hence the trade was confined to articles made complete, and of a very high and expensive type.

Naturally, improvements and modifications were made on the original machine, and the application of steam power to lace machinery in 1816 probably helped. The invention of the Jacquard machine in 1836 gave a great impetus to the trade, as this enabled manufacturers to develop and exploit the business to its fullest extent. Machines were taken to the Continent in 1828—to Lille by Clark, to Calais by Rayner, and to Paris by Bonnington (father of the artist). The object of this was to exploit the French market, which always bought the bulk of the goods. The trade reached its zenith from 1850 to 1870, and was remarkable for the elaborate and rich beauty of the designs produced, mostly in imitation of Chantilly and Bayeux real laces. As stated above, the machines could only produce these patterns in a flat shadowy form, and to bring out their richness and beauty it was necessary for the pattern to be "run" or outlined by hand-workers, operating in their own homes, in various country districts in and around Nottingham. The most elaborate shawls had to be out some two or three months before the outlining was fully completed, and were sold wholesale at prices varying from £5 to £10. One such shawl was shown at the 1851 Exhibition and awarded a medal, the shawl being subsequently presented to Queen Victoria.

A great change in fashion began in 1867, when shawls, up to that time an indispensable article in a lady's wardrobe, began to be out of favor; lace and Paisley shawls being discarded and displaced by smaller articles which could be made more quickly and cheaper on Levers machines. This, together with the Franco-Prussian War, which closed the French market, caused Pusher articles to be neglected, and the machines were

scrapped. There are a few machines in Lyons that produce expensive scarves and mantillas, for Spain principally, which are either Pusher or a close modification of it.

Although the bulk of Pusher lace was made of silk, quite a quantity was made in cotton. The yarn was possibly best Sea Island cotton, spun very closely to give it a lustrous and rich appearance. Mixtures of silk and cotton do not appear to have been used.



THERE IS NO OUTLINE CORD TO SET OFF THE DESIGN IN THIS EARLY
SPECIMEN OF PUSHER LACE
FROM THE COLLECTION OF MRS. LOUIS ETLINGER, NEW YORK