A UNIQUE, DUTCH, SABOT-SHAPED, MAHOGANY BOBBIN FOR LACE MAKING.

NOTES ON EARLY DUTCH LACE

Ed. Note: We are indebted to Miss Gertrude Whiting for this article by the late Jonkheer[1] Governor Doctor Jan Six of The Hague.

OLD LACE is not rare in Holland, either among heirlooms or in collections formed from what has come into the market from other than native sources. While one may chance upon some exquisite example of Danish provenance amongst the collections of rare seventeenth century Venetian or eighteenth century French laces, or amongst the needlepoint and bobbin work from Hainaut, Brabant or Flanders, to discover a piece that can with certainty be determined as Holland work would be wellnigh impossible.

So far as I know, there is no lace tradition in the Netherlands, except such as is found in the caps from Gouda—so akin to Danish lace—and the bonnets, baby clothes, waistcoats et cetera, from the Zaan, Saardam, and the villages of the river. These, which date from the eighteenth century, are worked in such a close, thick design, that although they may certainly be considered lace, the work is often referred to as embroidery. Moreover, even the lace from Sluys, which has its own distinctive character, is of little help in identifying the native fabric of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The only section of my country, I think, where lace-making is still carried on among the women of the poorer classes, is southern Zeeland: this district, though long an integral part of the Kingdom, was originally conquered territory, known under the republic as Staats Vlaanderen, a name denoting its Flemish source.

[1]Jonkheer, the title of a noble heir, is an endearing term, used, even after he comes into full rights, by tenantry and friends in preference to a formal title.

FIG. 1

THE REGENTESSES OF THE SPINHUIS. PAINTED IN 1638 BY DIRCK DIRCKSZ (VAN) SANTVOORT. RIJKS MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM.

Fine lace in former days was made chiefly as a religious offering or as personal luxury, the result of an immense amount of either unpaid or poorly rewarded labor. Now, it must be remembered that at this time there were no nunneries in Holland to enrich the church altars with lace-trimmed linens; and, in the second place, that the Dutch have never been

inclined to luxury. The sea yielded riches to these sturdy people, whose humble fisherfolk gained a livelihood from salting the herring of the North Sea, whose whaling fleets braved the waters of the arctic seas as far as the coast of Spitzenberg and whose merchants, always seeking distant fields for their commerce, traded from the Baltic and Mediterranean to the East Indies and Australia (once New Holland) whose enterprise founded factories as far to the west as Brooklyn (Nieuw Breukelen) and New Amsterdam. The simple sailor-wives could live on the wages their men brought home without straining their eyes with the weary task of lace-making as did the poor women of the south Netherlands, where, under the misgovernment of Spain, the people were deprived of their former prosperity and wealth.

Thus the provenance of the lace that adorns the rich collars found in the Dutch portraits[2] of the seventeenth century is a question still to be solved, and the rare examples that remain to us do not help to elucidate the problem as there seems no basis whereon to establish a theory. Since the introduction of lace collars and cuffs dates from the time of the Armistice with Spain, those worn at The Hague may have been imported from Brussels, Antwerp or perhaps from Italy.

If, now, we turn to the field of painting for evidence of lace-making in Holland, we find that the lace-maker is a subject which appears infrequently, and Vermeer's famous canvas in the Louvre, which portrays a young woman of the burgher class employing a leisure hour with her lace pillow, proves nothing as to the contemporary status of this industry among the women of the people. On the other hand, a painting by Jan Luyken shows that, even if the housewives were over busy in tidying their houses and in laundering their linen, there must have been aged spinsters and widows who made lace either as a pastime or as a means of livelihood.

As to this fact, however, I can offer even more positive evidence in a painting brought to my attention which, if nothing more, proves that although lace-making may not have been as usual an occupation among the women as spinning, an attempt was certainly made to introduce this work among the paupers of Amsterdam in the hope of reducing criminality by means of steady employment requiring close application. In this

[2]By Van Miereveld, Moreelse, Ravesteijn, Frans Hals and Rembrandt.

masterpiece (Fig. 1) of Dirck Dircksz Santvoort (1610–1680) painted in 1638, the artist has chosen for his subject a group representing the Regentesses of the Spinhuis at Amsterdam, a work from which I wish to draw some deductions.

It had been the custom in old Amsterdam to compel unemployed girls to attend classes in a chapel where women with spinning wheels, spindles, cards and like implements taught them a useful craft. With the same end in view, the town council in 1579 arranged a spinning house in the former convent of Saint Ursula where, above the door, appeared this legend explicitly stating the purpose of the institution:

"Om schamele Meyskens, Maegden en Vrouwen,
'tBedelen, leech-gaen en dool-wech te schouwen
Is dit spin-huis ghesticht, soon men hier sien mach;
Elck laet sich niet verveelen nock rouwen,
Uyt Chariteyt hier aen de handt te houwen.
Wie weet wat hom oft de zijne noch geschien mach."
(To keep indigent girls, maidens and women
From begging, idleness and going astray
This spinhouse was built, as one may see here;
Let not anyone be bored nor begrudge
To keep this in hand out of charity
Who knows what may befall him or his kin.)

Soon, however, the house took on the aspect of a reformatory, where women of questionable character were detained, and in time even such as had been condemned to the pillory for theft or other misdemeanors.

In 1607 a bas relief by Hendrick de Keyser, indicating the new function of the institution, was added. This showed three figures: a woman spinning, another carding, and between them, symbolizing correction, a third urging the work on with a scourge. An attempt, however, to mitigate the all too harsh portent suggested by the central figure, appears in an appended legend of Pieter Cornelisz Hooft:

"Schrick niet. Ick wreek geen kwaed: maer dwing tot goet.
Straf is mijn hand: maer lieflijk mijn gemoet."
That is: "Be not afraid, I revenge not evil: but enforce good.
Severe is my hand: but kindly my heart."

When, in 1645, the house was splendidly rebuilt after the fire of 1643,

three figures of women spinning, sewing and knitting were placed upon the entablature. This, though, was after the picture in question was painted.

Besides the regents of the house, there were originally a couple of regentesses or *buiten moeders* (mothers outside the house), whose number in time rose to four. In the year that interests us, there were evidently still only two. They used to meet every three or four weeks on Thursday afternoon. It is upon one of these occasions that we see them in the Santvoort picture grouped about a table on which there is a green cloth embroidered in gold, a book and a red lacquered wooden bowl with some silver coins.

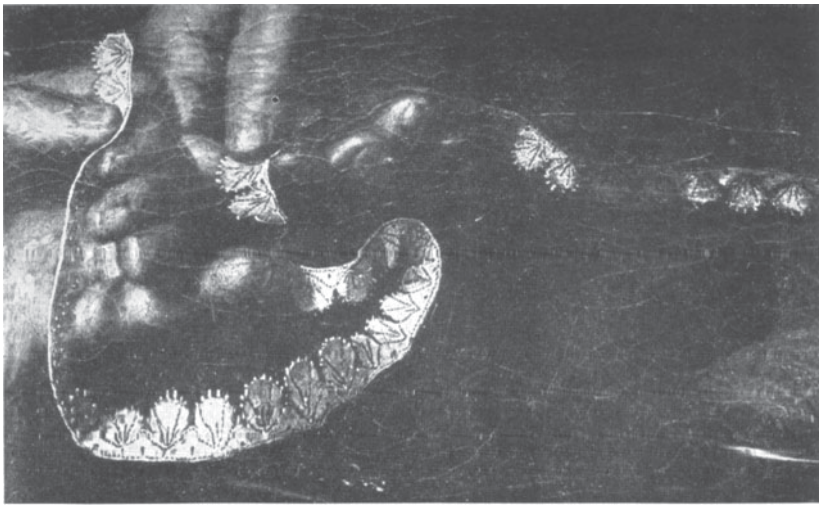

FIG. 2

DETAIL FROM SANTVOORT'S PAINTING, SEE FIG. 1.

These objects in their blended harmony give the sole color note in a painting where otherwise black and white predominate. Besides the regentesses, two other women are present. The one in the foreground counting out the money, would be the directress, who was called *Boven-binnen-moeder*, a title indicating that she had at least one assistant as *Binnen-moeder*. Such a one we see further back in the picture, and it is she who especially interests us; for she hands to the regentess on the left a piece of lace, which cannot but have been made in the house under her supervision. Santvoort has painted this, as was his wont, with such exactness that we see the

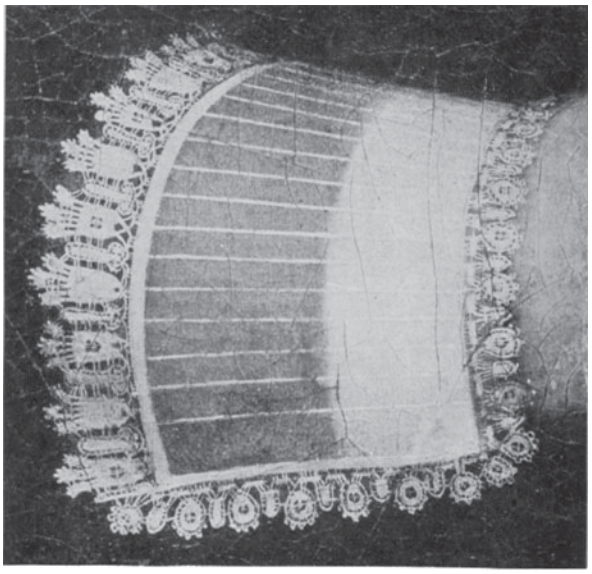

FIG. 3

DETAIL FROM SANTVOORT'S PAINTING, SEE FIG. 1.

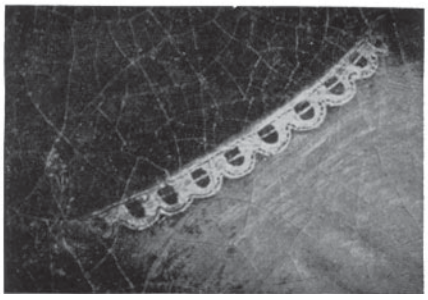

FIG. 4

DETAIL FROM SANTVOORT'S PAINTING,
SEE FIG. 1.

whole design before us, as if we had the lace itself in hand (Fig. 2). Thus we may feel sure, that though this small design is akin to Flemish lace, it certainly may be called Dutch.

Now, it is hardly by accident, that the regentess to the right wears a cuff (Fig. 3) that, in the wider of the two edgings with which it is trimmed, shows in its palmettes the closest analogy of design to the lace held in the hand of the aforementioned assistant; in the narrower lace with pierced ovals, the pattern is related to the very narrow edging, (Fig. 4) which looks almost like embroidery, on the wrist of the other regentess; but it cannot be other than lace. I do not remember ever having seen the like, but it is so very simple we need not wonder that such may not have been preserved.

I am fortunate in having four cuffs of the same epoch that, though richer, are more or less similar to this kind of work. Two of them are a pair (Fig. 5), the others unmated; so that they afford us three broader and three smaller designs. The latter, the narrow edging in Figure 5, may be compared with the piece from the spinhouse (Fig. 2). That shown in Figure 6, though not dissimilar, more nearly resembles the wider lace of the painted cuff.

The fourth cuff, (Fig. 7) has in its narrow edge a somewhat more replete design in the same spirit, and in that respect this may be compared to a better preserved border from an old family possession of mine (Fig. 8).[3] Such cuffs are not rare in paintings of the epoch. I limit myself to referring only to one now before me—a *post mortem* portrait of Suzanna Bex, 1638, the wife of Jan de Neufville, who lived at Amsterdam; a picture probably by Joachim Sandrart, where I find the kind of lace in question folded in like manner about her wrist and with a similar border, somewhat broader, around her cap. The wider lace of her cuffs and collar are again so similar to those of mine, especially the laces of Figure 7, as to be of the same epoch if further proof were needed.

But though, of course, it is quite possible that these too might have been made in Holland, the testimony of the smaller piece we started from (Fig. 2), does not stretch far enough to absolutely prove it. Notwithstand-

[3]The linen which this lace edging adorns is unlike any that I have seen before in its complicated weaving pattern of combined zig-zag bands and varied groupings of birds-eye lozenges.

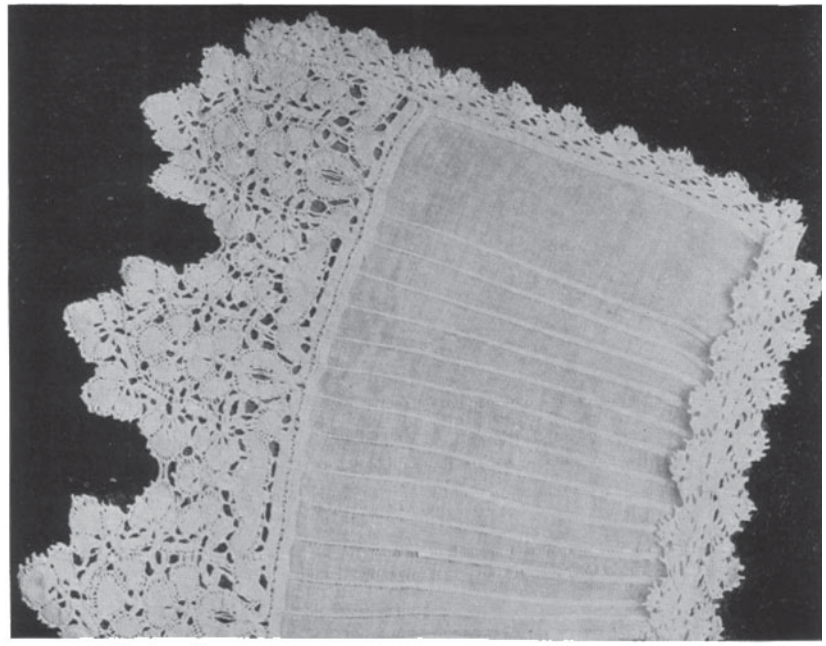

FIG. 6

DETAIL OF A CUFF EDGED WITH BOBBIN LACE. FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE WRITER.

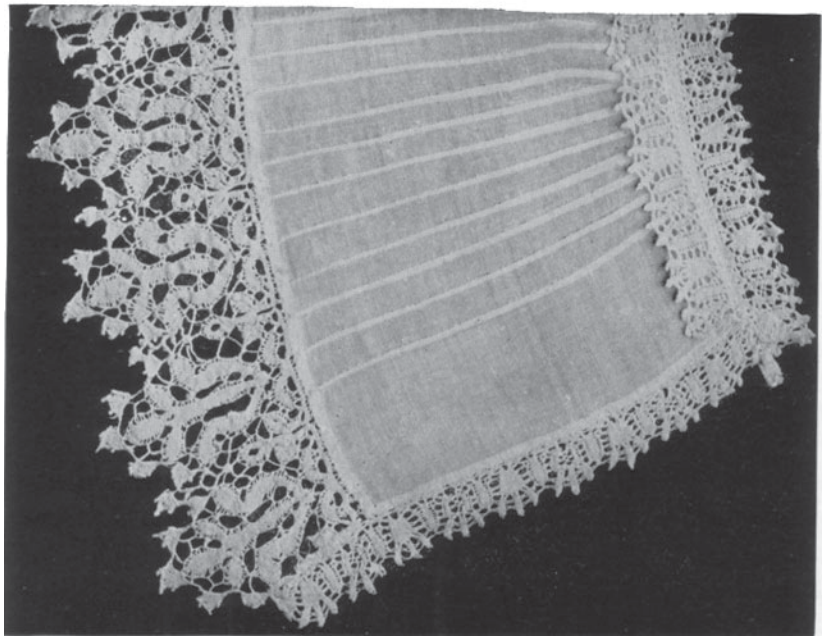

FIG. 5

DETAIL OF A CUFF EDGED WITH BOBBIN LACE. FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE WRITER.

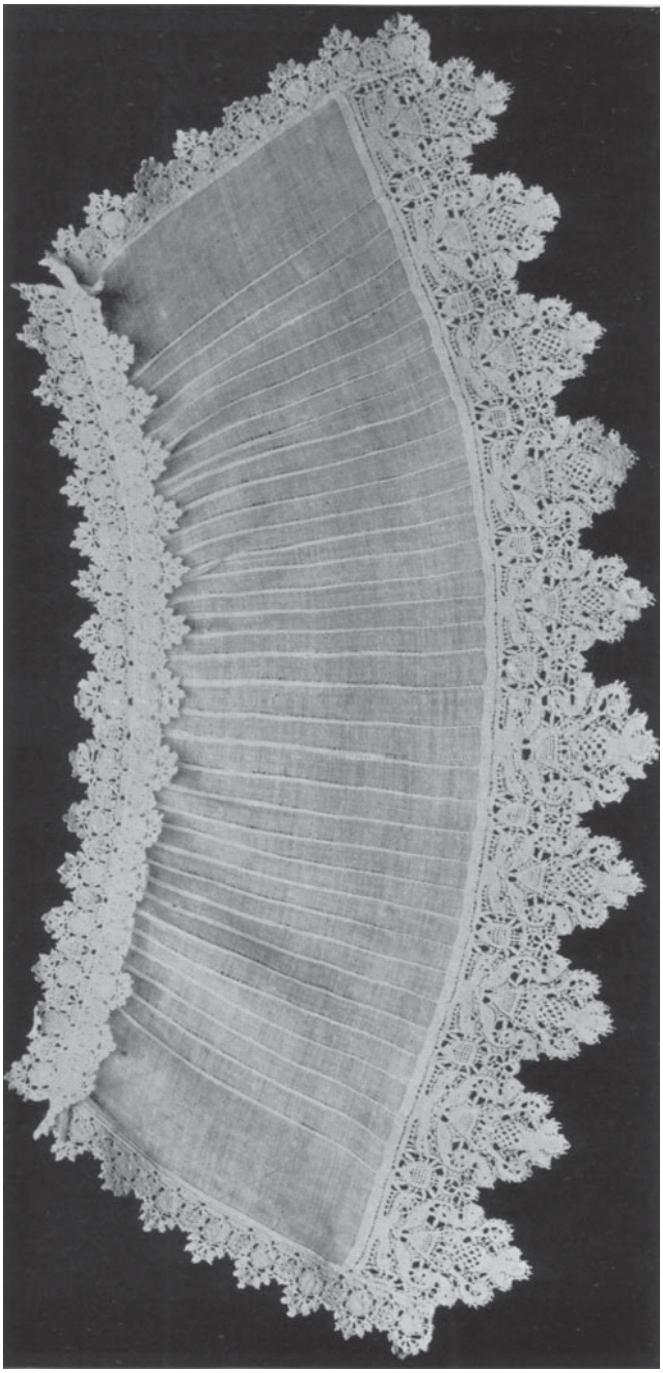

FIG. 7

CUFF EDGED WITH BOBBIN LACE. FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE WRITER.

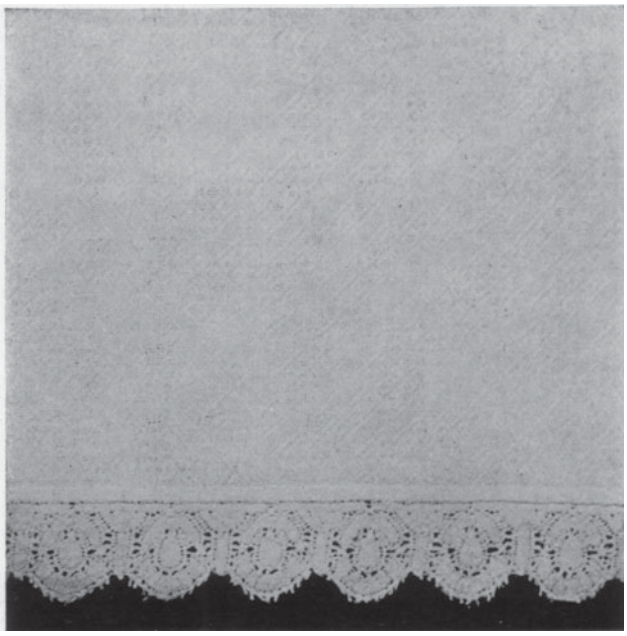

FIG. 8

LINEN EDGED WITH BOBBIN LACE. FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE WRITER.

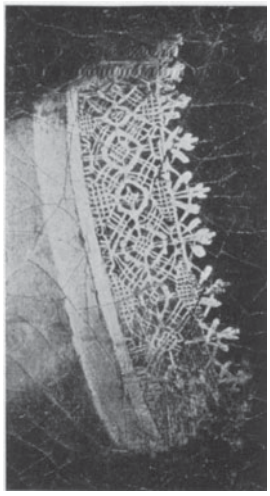

FIG. 9

DETAIL FROM SANTVOORT'S PAINTING, SEE FIG. 1.

ing the war with Spain, I hardly think that all commerce could have come to a standstill after the Netherlands were in its power.

The same reserve must be made as to the last small cuff with the wider lace worn by the directress of the spinhouse herself (Fig. 9). The design is more open and looks as if it were somewhat older. I find it allied to the lace (Fig. 10) bordering a large pocket handkerchief (48 x 46 centimeters) of the finest linen then woven at Haarlem.[4]

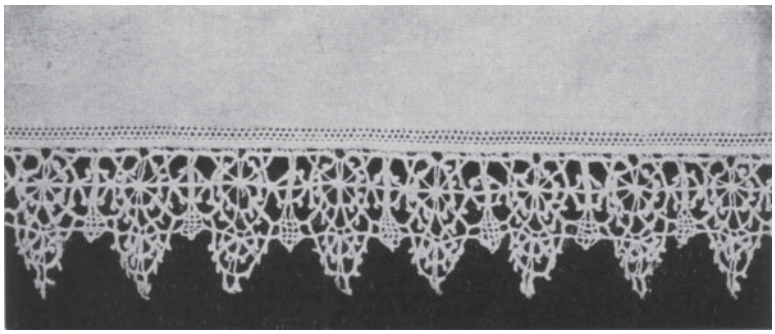

FIG. 10

DETAIL FROM A LINEN HANDKERCHIEF EDGED WITH LACE.

But again, the lace may have come from Flanders and we must rest content with the certitude that in 1638 narrow bobbin lace was made in the spinhouse at Amsterdam in the style we have seen, and that what was made in Holland is so nearly allied to Flemish work in pattern and fabric, that it is, so to speak, Flemish lace made in the Netherlands, even as in France the early needlepoint was Italian in spirit and style.

JAN SIX.

[4]In this linen there are 45 threads to the centimeter (3100 in the ell); that is, what was called 31 C fine.

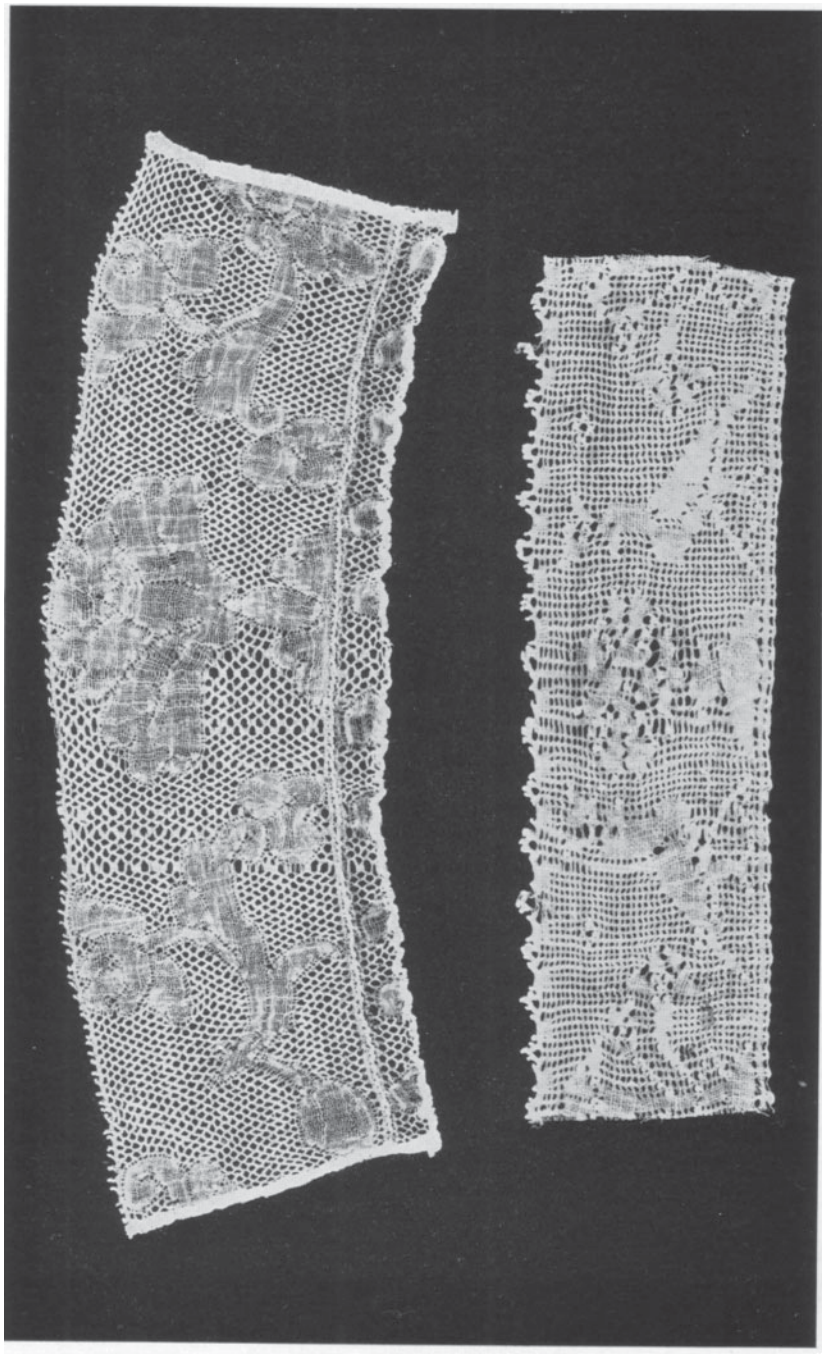

FIG. 12

ABOVE, VALENCIENNES CUFF; BELOW, LACE WITH BOBBIN-FILET GROUND. DUTCH, NINETEENTH CENTURY.

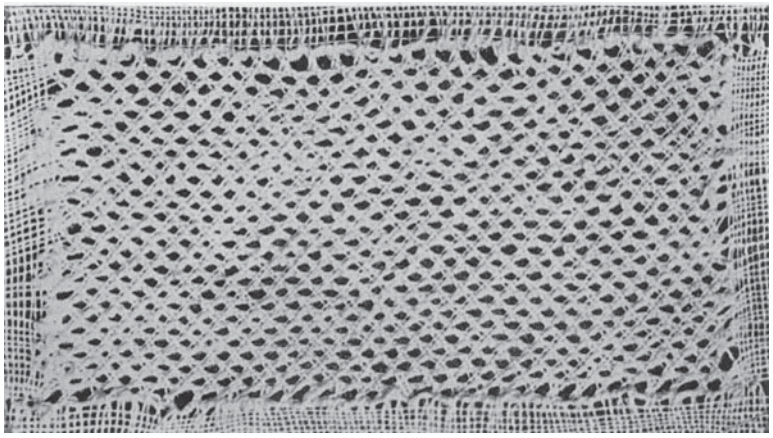

FIG. 11

The illustrations in Figs. 11, 12, and 13 are interesting examples of Dutch lace for which the *Bulletin* is indebted to Miss Gertrude Whiting. The explanatory notes accompanying them have also been contributed by Miss Whiting.

Fig. 11. A four times magnified specimen of the heavy, closely constructed Dutch variety of Valenciennes ground.

Fig. 12. Above; A nineteenth century, thick meshed Valenciennes cuff. Dutch.

Below; Crowned birds in a compact, bobbin-filet ground. This is twisted once but typical *fond hollandais* is twisted twice. Both specimens here illustrated are more solid than open. Such pieces were originally intended to evade the Dutch sumptuary laws against lace. A trimming three-quarters linen, women argued, could not be construed as lace work. Moreover, durable lace would appeal to the Dutch sense of thrift.

Fig. 13. The design of this lace, now in the Rijks Museum, Amsterdam, includes the W for William, a V standing for Fifth, some oranges for Orange, and a pair of royal lions. The lace was made in an Amsterdam orphanage and was formerly in the possession of Heer G. T. Goede. Its Dutch provenance is of special interest to students of lace history.

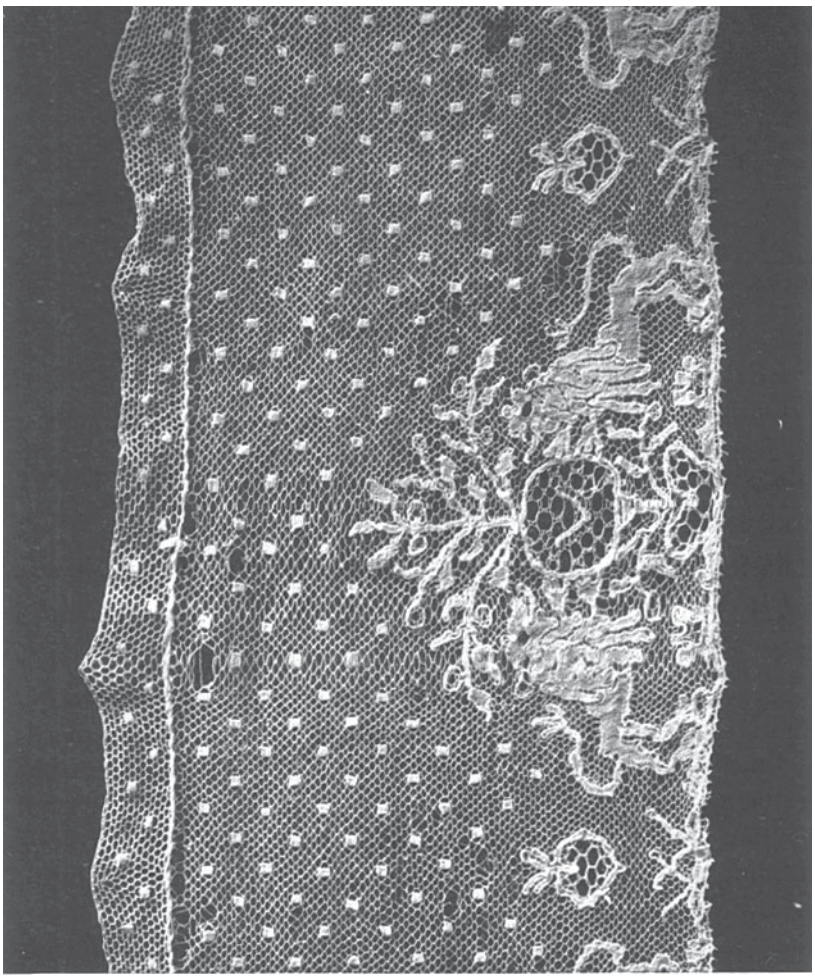

FIG. 13

BOBBIN LACE. MADE FOR WILLIAM THE FIFTH OF ORANGE. RIJKS MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM