

PLATE I
 TITLE-PAGE OF NÜW MODELBUCH. PRINTED BY
 CHRISTOPH FROSCHAUER ABOUT 1561.
 COURTESY OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART.

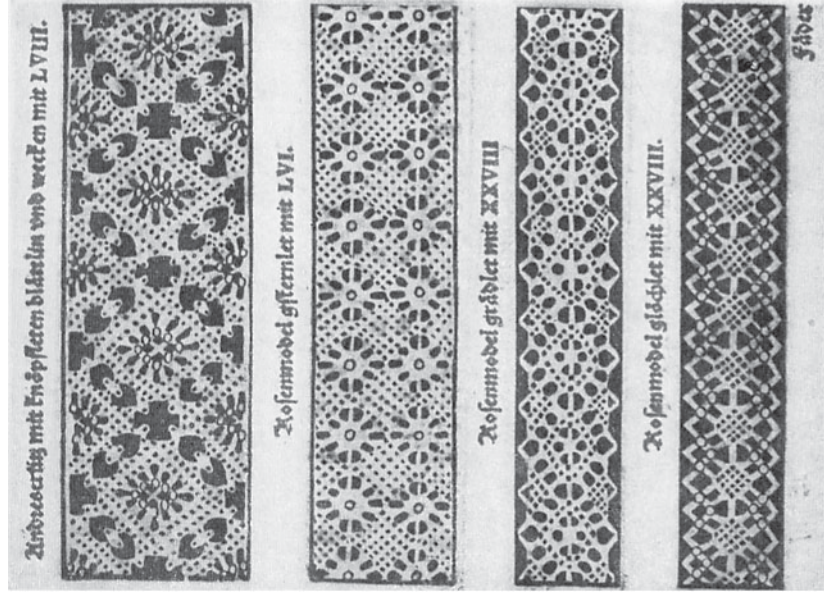


PLATE II
 PAGE FROM NÜW MODELBUCH.
 COURTESY OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART.

SWISS LACE PATTERNS

From material collected by

GERTRUDE WHITING

TO ANYONE interested in early lace-making in Europe, Italy and Flanders are the names that naturally come to mind. But while these are the countries that we associate with the creation and development of lace as we know it, small heed is ever paid to Switzerland, though this little country has been called one of the first followers of Venice. Swiss lace, moreover, which is in the main bobbin-made, has a long and continuous history. Its records run back almost as far as those of the Venetian fabric, and it possessed in 1561, which is a reasonably early date for these valued publications, a lace pattern book put together and published in its own country.⁽¹⁾

Yet, notwithstanding these early and favorable conditions, Switzerland occupies a minor position — if, in truth, it occupies any position at all — in lace books. The reason lies in the character of its population. In a country so diversified in nationalities as was Switzerland foreign influences were strong and as a result the lace-makers, rather than developing as did their celebrated neighbors, a distinct style of their own, in all cases followed the designs that were at hand. This militated against the creation of any native type.

The situation is set forth clearly by Mlle. Emilie Cherbuliez in the little guide that she wrote for a collection of laces in Geneva.⁽²⁾ In this small pamphlet, in which are illustrated the fine laces of all European countries except Switzerland, the writer says, and rather mournfully, that, properly speaking, there is no Swiss lace, that in no part of Switzerland can there be found a technique or style that might be called in-

¹. As far as is known the first pattern books were made in Germany. The earliest dated pattern book now known is *Ein new Modelbuch* printed in 1524 at Zwickau by Johann Schönsperger the Younger. This book is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. What is held to be an earlier edition, and therefore the earliest book of all, is the *Furm-oder Modelbuchlein*, attributed to Schönsperger because of the type and initials. This may be dated about 1523. Of the two copies existing one is in the Kunstgewerbe Museum in Leipzig and the other (incomplete) in the Museum f. Kunst u. Industrie in Vienna. Margaret Harrington Daniels, *Early Pattern Books for Lace and Embroidery*. The Bulletin of the Needle and Bobbin Club, 1933, Vol. 17, No. 2, p. 3.

². Les Dentelles de la salle Amélie Piot, par Mlle. Emilie Cherbuliez. Genève. Musée d'art et d'histoire. (n.d.)

digenous to the country. At Zurich and part of eastern Switzerland, she continues, German models were followed, in the southern cantons it was Italian work that provided the inspiration, and in Neuchâtel and localities in the Jura mountains the prevailing patterns were French. Yet, despite the promiscuous character that it inevitably assumed, Swiss lace has its tradition and it has its pattern book.

In Zurich, in about 1561, there was published by Christopher Froschauer who was a printer of this locality, a book of bobbin-made patterns called a *Nüw Modelbuch*.⁽³⁾ This little book, which is of no small historical interest in the story of lace pattern books, is made up of designs gathered by a lace-maker who is known only by the initials R. M. (Plate I.) Accompanying the plates is a foreword by this anonymous author, written in the most sympathetic and friendly spirit, in which she says in the very first lines that the art of lace-making had been practiced in the country for twenty-five years and that it had been introduced in 1536 by merchants from Venice and other parts of Italy coming to "Germany," which is to say German-speaking countries as is Switzerland in part. She then takes up the introduction of lace-making into Switzerland, its favorable reception — the lucrative nature of the craft apparently being quickly understood — its rapid increase and improvement, with the workers not only reproducing Italian models, but originating others of their own and finally, at the end, her resolution to impart to others, by means of this pattern book, the sum of her practice and experience, partly to help willing workers who otherwise might not readily come upon beautiful or artistic patterns, but mainly for the "beloved" students who for twelve years in Zurich had been under the tutelage of this anonymous teacher.

The patterns in this early Swiss lace book are geometric in character as were other lace patterns at the time, and it is stated that they followed Italian models. They are made up of a series of bands, more than a hundred and fifty of them, some wide and some narrow, and some finished with little edgings. (Plate II.) They were used first, on the authority of this early writer, solely for the trimming of chemises and shirts, later for collars, cuffs, caps and "fronts" for bodies of dresses and also for household linens, pillow cases, coverlets and other objects of the kind. There was great advantage, it would seem, in replacing by a bit of

³ Complete copies of this Zurich pattern book exist in the Zurich Zentral Bibl., in the Basel Gerwerbe Museum and in the Osterr. Museum für Kunst und I. in Vienna. An incomplete copy is in a private collection in Cambridge, Massachusetts and there is a facsimile in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

lace the elaborate stitchings and puffings that formerly had been necessary for the making of collars and like articles. "One can hardly imagine," says this earnest writer, "the time sewing women consume in making such things."

Lace-making started thus favorably, received a great impetus in the seventeenth century when the revocation in 1685 of the Edict of Nantes brought to Switzerland great numbers of Protestant refugees thus destined to introduce their crafts into other countries. Geneva, for one, profited in the matter of gold and silver guipures which formerly had been so rich a source of revenue to Lyons. According to tradition it was one Symphorien Thelussen, a descendant of a merchant of Lyons escaping in an earlier day to Geneva from the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, who gathered two thousand of these skilled workers into the lace-making industry. Whatever may have the leadership, the enterprise grew to great proportions until it extended from the canton of Vaux in southwestern Switzerland nearly to Basel in the northwest with Neuchâtel as its center. This is a position that was always retained by this cheerful, sunny town with its handsome houses of creamy yellow stone into which their owners' names are carved. The finest laces have been held to come from this region. Other sections that were engaged in lace-making were Porentruy, Fleurens, Couvet and the Lake of Joux. By 1752, according to a census, there were in the canton of Neuchâtel nearly three thousand lace-makers as well as one hundred and twenty-eight spinners of the thread used for the lace.

It was at this time that a pleasant historical note was introduced into the history of lace-making when Jean Jacques Rousseau, another refugee, but mildly so, from the storm caused in France by his political and religious writings, came to Motier in the Val du Travers. Here, by permission of the Prussian governor, since this district at the time belonged to Prussia, he lived from 1762 to 1765 and here he wrote his *Lettres écrites de la Montagne*. He amused himself during his sojourn by manipulating the fascinating little walnut bobbins of that section. He carried his pillow with him when he went abroad among his neighbors, or, when at home, he sat in his doorway and made lace in the manner of the local inhabitants. His own account in his *Confessions* of the society in which he found himself was hardly flattering for he says, "I had counselled myself, in order to avoid living like a savage, to learn to make braidings. I carried my cushion, in visiting, wherever I went like the women, to work by my door and converse. That made me support the

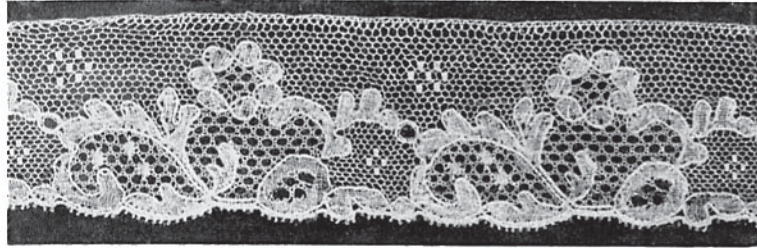


PLATE III-A
SWISS BOBBIN LACE MADE IN NEUCHÂTEL, LILLE TYPE.

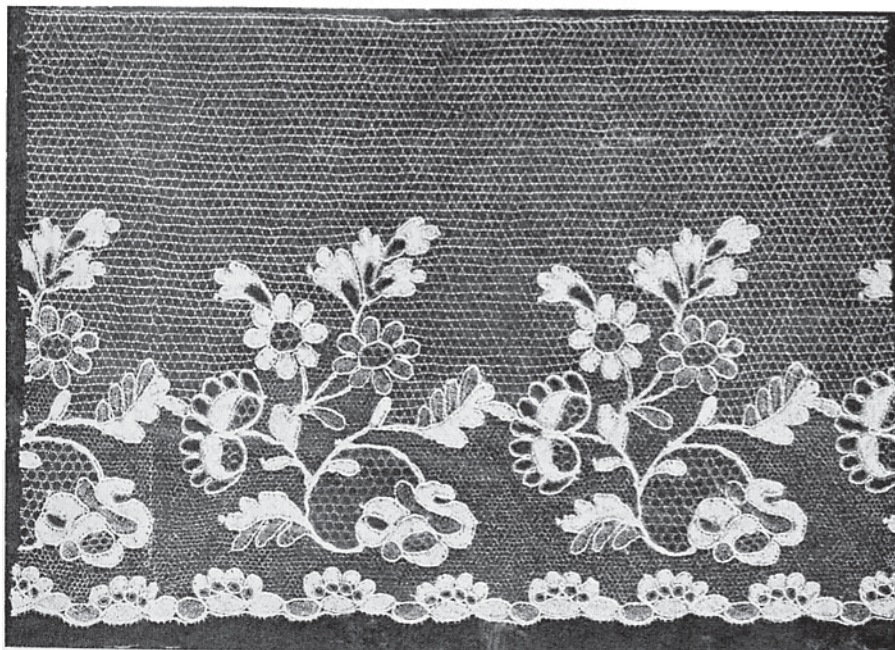


PLATE III-B
SILK BLONDE LACE MADE IN NEUCHÂTEL.

inabilities of neighbors; several of whom were friendly enough and did not lack spirit.”

By 1780 lace was being exported from Switzerland in great quantities and the workers were earning large sums every year. This vigorous phase of the industry continued well into the nineteenth century, even through the French revolution, with Swiss laces being transported by relays of horses to Spain and Mediterranean countries, thence to be shipped to Mexico and the Antilles for altar trimmings and for personal use. By 1816 lace was being made not only from linen flax but from black and white silk (blonde lace) as well. (Plate III-B.) It was about this year that Mayor Huguenin, mayor of Neuchâtel, testifies as to the variety of types. He describes them as “very wide, very fine and very complicated laces.” Part of the flax for Swiss lace-making was cultivated locally, but the finest qualities came from Holland.

In a sudden and unexpected manner, however, this thriving industry that had for so long furnished support to so many parts of the country, virtually came to an end. Mirecourt, in the Dept. of Vosges, where fine and delicate laces long had been made, in order to effect a novelty, changed its patterns. It was a move that met with complete success and affected adversely its formidable rivals, Lille, Geneva and Val-du-Travers. As a result Lille manufacturers lowered their prices and the Swiss lace industry sank. Thus, in 1817, after the fall of Napoleon, and at a time when more Swiss lace-makers were being employed than at any other period, a depression set in.

In an attempt to relieve the situation a company was formed known as the Société Neuchâteloise d'Emulation which hoped to stimulate lace-making by means of prizes. Included in this group were some of the best known Swiss manufacturers: Rosselet frères and Piget frères of Verrières; David Lebet et fils Victor, of Buttes; Bugnion frères of Fleurier; Jeanrenand-Besson at Motiers; la Maison Jeanneret at Travers; Besson, H. (père) and D. fils) and Coulin, D. at Couvet as well as Frédéric Duval allied with L. Petitpierre. Prizes of money were offered in 1817, in 1824, when the amount was increased, and again, with higher awards in 1826, but all this was to no general avail. In 1826 another prize was announced, this time to the worker who could invent a new lace ground, clear, strong, regular, differing from all others and difficult for machines to copy. In 1829, eleven new stitches were offered but they were considered no better, or not as good, as was the prevailing ground. In 1830, fourteen more were received but the two

manufacturers and two lace workers who examined them judged them too reminiscent of former stitches and patterns. Then it was decided to try a variation, not of the ground, but of the designs themselves as had been done so successfully at Mirecourt, but when Mélanie Matthey of Crozot, their best designer proved unequal to the task, it spelled the end, not only of the long contest, but of the lace industry itself.

The attempt to devise a novel and effective pattern might be considered by a layman the more difficult in view of the number and variety already existing. In a great album of lace patterns found by chance in a cabinet-maker's shed at Couvet, near Neuchâtel, and formerly in the possession of Miss Whiting, there are over two thousand examples, all varied and all charming in design. Presumably this album in its day had been the property of one of the leading Swiss lace houses and these were the key or master designs from which lace orders could be taken. Its ultimate discovery in surroundings so foreign to its original purpose was a circumstance that hardly could have been foreseen by its one-time owners. The patterns in this album are all hand drawn on thin, white paper, the net meshes minutely indicated by pricked, not inked, holes. They are numbered and pasted from one to one thousand on the fronts of the pages of the book, crowded close without margins. From one thousand to two thousand two hundred and forty-one they are mounted on the reverse of the pages. They show designs, for the most part, of the late eighteenth century and occasionally they bear corresponding dates; there is, for example, "Chev. Amy, Couvet le 6 Avril, 1796." (Plate IV-A.) Others are marked with characteristic Swiss names, one, in

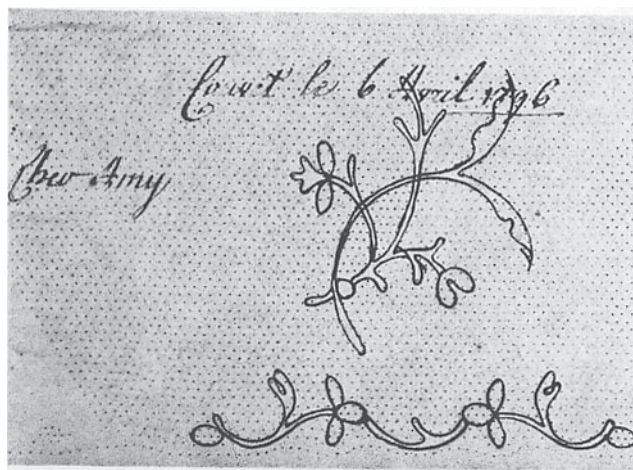


PLATE IV-A
LACE PATTERN SIGNED CHEV AMY, 1796.

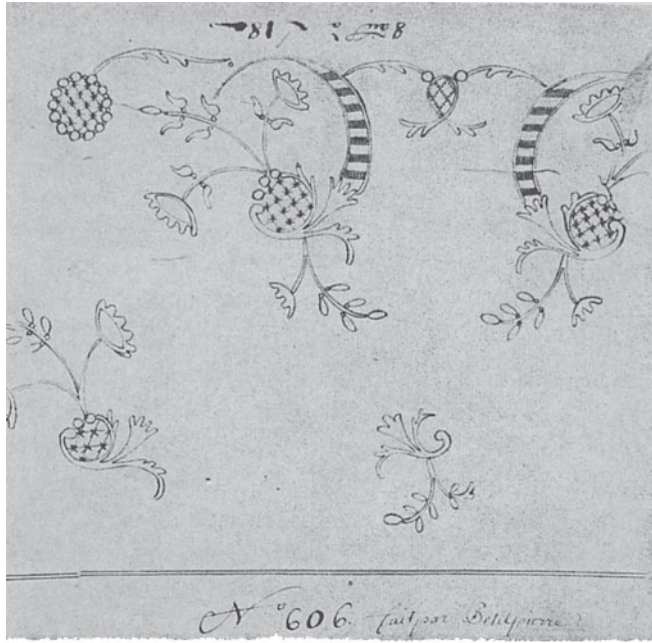


PLATE IV-B
DESIGN FOR LACE SIGNED FAIT PAR PETITPIERRE.

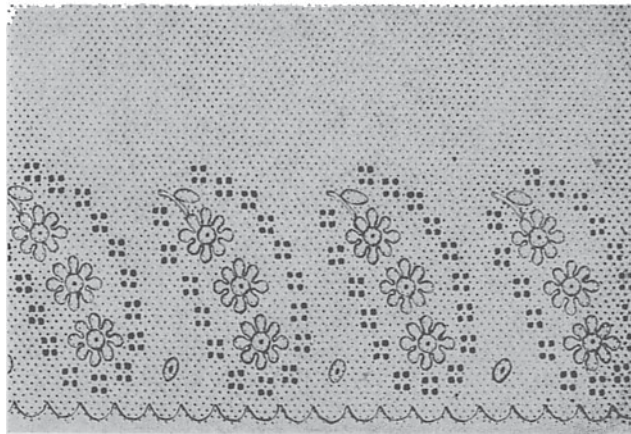


PLATE IV-C
LACE PATTERN FROM SWISS PATTERN BOOK.

faded, fine handwriting, a member of the Petitpierre family "fait par Petitpierre." (Plate IV-B.) The book, aside from its value as a treasure house of Swiss lace patterns, is the more important since it offers proof of what actually was being done by the Swiss lace-maker at this particular time.

Later in the nineteenth century when all the attempts of the *Société* had proved of no avail, various projects were set on foot by others to revive lace-making. In 1840 a factory was established at Geneva for making a kind of Brussels lace called *point plat de Bruxelles dite de Genève*. This lace, however, tended to thicken with washing and therefore did not succeed. In about 1900 a Swiss lady, Mme. H. H. de Juillien, who had studied in Mexico under a Spanish lace-maker of quality, returned to Neuchâtel bringing with her not only the comfortable Spanish lace pillow, long and cylindrical, capable of being supported against anything solid such as the edge of a table without a special frame and with space on its surface for the working of two lace patterns, but she introduced also a superior system of teaching, whereby two stitches at a time were taught, worked into a simple pattern, then one dropped and another added, thus expanding the pupil's knowledge until she knew the basic principles of a number of stitches rather than the technique of her native province alone. The daughter of this enterprising woman later continued her mother's work and added a school at Lausanne.

More recently an attempt was made at Gruyères in the canton of Fribourg which by 1910 had grown to such encouraging proportions that the *Société Dentellière Gruyérienne* was founded. Filet work was added to bobbin lace-making and the Association Dentellière de Lauterbrunnen was included to teach lace-making to the women of this valley and keep the art of Switzerland from totally dying out.

These were all commendable attempts, but none of them apparently had the power to revive an industry that had so generally perished. Today there is no bobbin lace-making in Switzerland with the exception of certain private activities. The lace industry that had progressed so steadily since the days of its foundation never recovered from the disintegration that took place in the early years of the nineteenth century.

A charmingly sympathetic account of lace-making as it was practiced in the Jura mountains about the middle of the nineteenth century is given by a writer who still remembers in a later era a childhood when nearly every family of her acquaintance had an aunt or a grandmother who

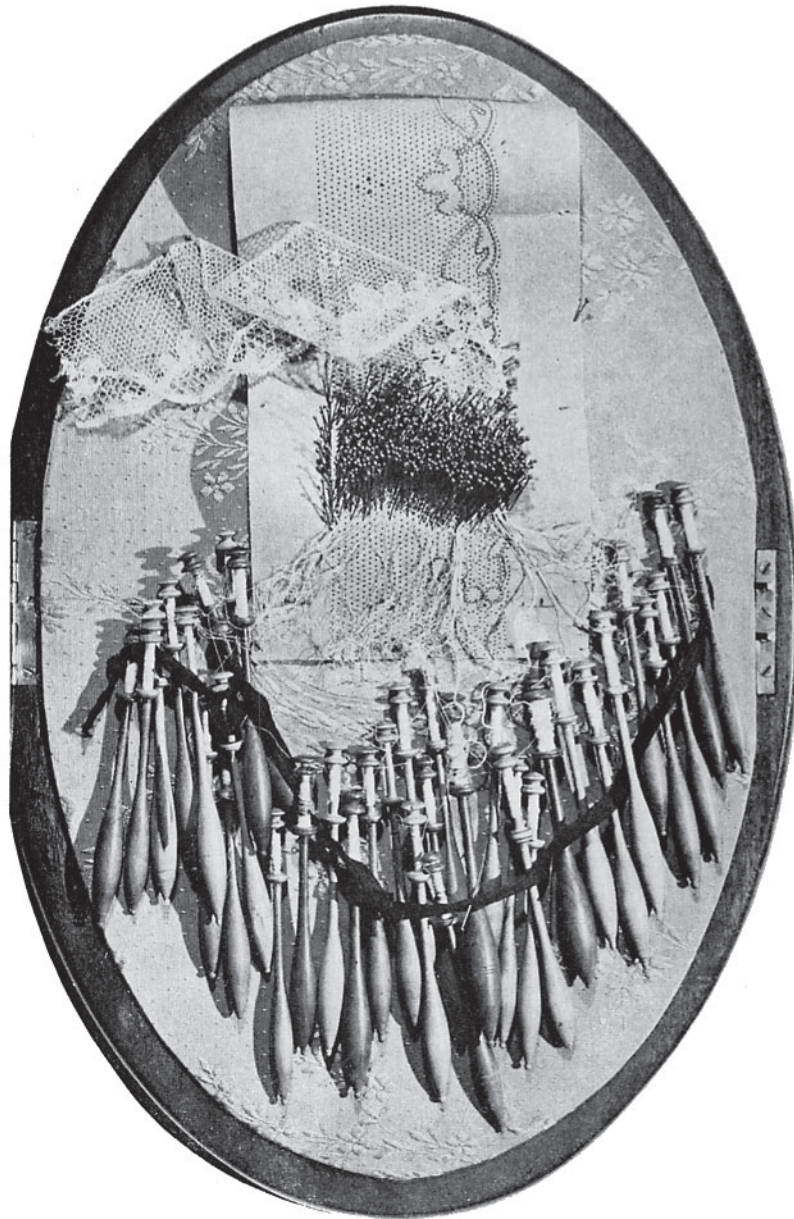


PLATE V

LACE FROM THE VAL DU TRAVERS SHOWING PATTERN (PRICKING),
PINS AND BOBBINS. FROM THE AUTHOR'S COLLECTION.

*This fine and silky thread, used in Neuchâtel before the French revolution,
survives today only in Cambrai where the flax is still raised and spun.*

was a lace-maker.⁴ She pictures, in a scene that she says can hardly have changed in sixty or eighty years, the little hamlets scattered through the high mountain valleys with their low, one-storied houses with great, sloping roofs facing south to receive all the sunshine possible in this cold country. (Endpiece.) In these houses, which were built to one plan, with a narrow corridor separating the family quarters from those of the barnyard and a great kitchen at the end with an immense chimney where a pig could be roasted, the principal room was the *chambre* in which the family congregated. This room, well kept and cheery, was flooded with light and sun and warmed by a monumental faience stove patterned with pictures of the hunt, mythology or sacred history. Between the stove, which projected into the room, and the wall, was a niche called a *cachet* with a stone bench heated at the same time as the stove. This, with reason, was known in the canton of Vaud as "the good corner." Here also was a huge bed hung with curtains and so smoothly made under its stitched counterpane that it looked like an exhibition piece never to be used.

The feature of the room was the wide windows where there was room not only for the women to work but for a large shelf for the watch-making implements of the men, who, with practiced fingers, pricked the designs for the lace on the dull green Bristol board that had replaced the parchment of earlier days. The lace pillows, for the most part, were square with *bollets* or moveable blocks that held the pattern and which could be placed or displaced as the work advanced. (Plate IV-A.) In the depths of this pillow, which was covered with a material of the same soft green as the Bristol board model, were three or four small drawers for thread and pins.

The lace like that made generally throughout Switzerland seems to have been of the Lille type with a design of flowers and leaves outlined with a cordonnet and with the little square dots found in Lille lace. The ground was the *fond clair*, the six-sided mesh with two threads crossed and four twisted that is characteristic of Lille. (Plate III-A.) Blonde laces also were made, both black and white, and a variety of stitches were used; *fond de neige*, *fond à la vierge*, *fond de mariage*, *point d'esprit* and a stitch that was called "*claret*." A narrow lace, made in other centers as well, was "*mignonette*" favored because of its light character

⁴. *Lacemakers of Switzerland*, written for the Musée Neuchâtelois, Nouvelle Serie, V. II, 1915, par Mme. M. Wavre-Barrelet, translated by Gertrude Whiting.

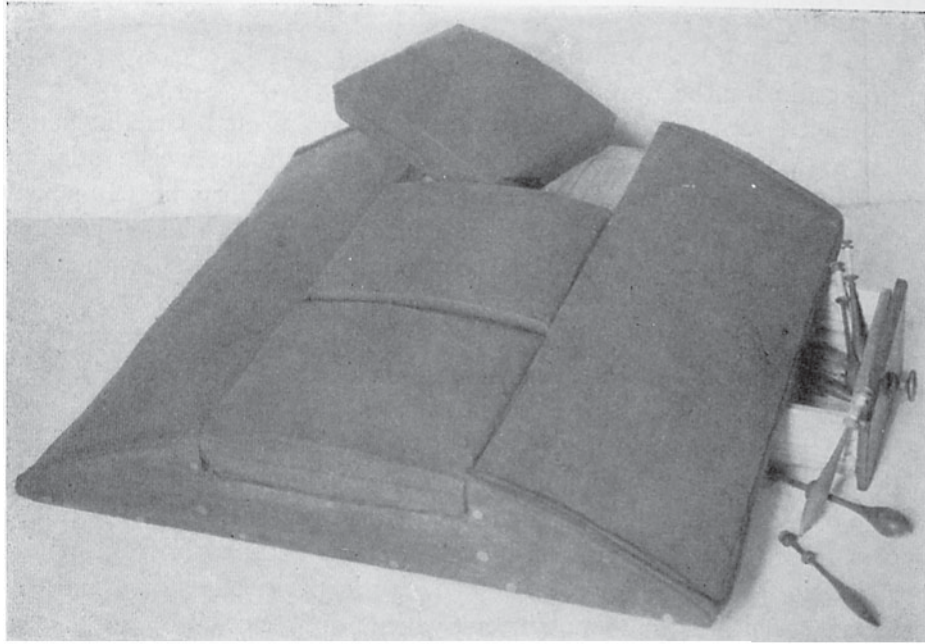


PLATE VI-A
SWISS LACE PILLOW WITH BOLLETS.
From the author's collection.

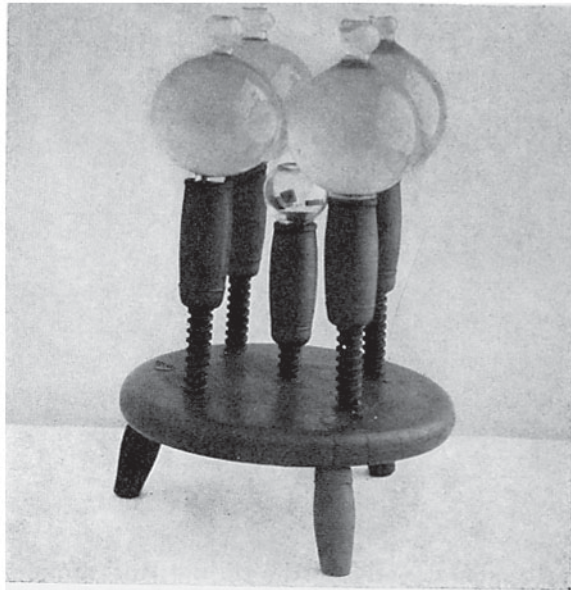


PLATE VI-B
LACEMAKER'S LAMP. COURTESY OF MRS. JESSE METCALF.

and clear ground for headdresses and trimmings. It was very popular in France during the Empire.

When the outdoor light failed, the workers formed a circle in the center of the room and continued by the light of the laceworker's lamp. This was a stand, sometimes prettily carved, supporting a board pierced with holes in each of which was inserted a stemmed globe — perhaps five or six in all — each as large as a goldfish bowl, filled with blue-tinged water and closed at the top with a cork. In the center was placed a candle or lamp and the light passing through the globe formed luminous rays which, directed upon the cushion of the worker, gave a soft, clear light. (Plate VI-B.)

These pleasant gatherings, where news of the village was combined with deft work by skilled fingers, were frequented by the young men of the locality who might read to the company from the weekly newspapers subscribed to in common by the villagers and passed from neighbor to neighbor. The company joined also in the good singing and the part songs which these mountaineers, with an innate sense of music executed sometimes without the knowledge technically of a single note of music. At the end of the evening there was a simple offering of oranges and nuts and at ten o'clock everyone went home.

In these districts where lace was too costly for personal wear, and moreover was a source of revenue, it was disposed of to local agents who undertook its collection and sale, at fairs at Beaucaire and Leipzig, bringing back large orders and new models. One courageous woman in the Jura mountains, a widow with several children, undertook for a livelihood such a trade. She collected her laces, which were brought to her from the countryside in the spring, paying well for them, and journeyed with her various and divers boxes in a large traveling *berline* to France to the Fair of Beaucaire, taking with her as sole protector one confidential servant. Her lace was eagerly awaited and she sold it with ease and dispatch, returning with new orders for the workers. Her heroic and beneficial efforts were long remembered in after years and her lace models which are in the museum of Neuchâtel have commanded high praise. But these pleasant activities and undertakings were themselves suddenly to vanish. The introduction of machine lace and the flight westward of watchmaking, with its essential processes already made known to others, in a few years made for the ruin of bobbin-lace making. The art was finally abandoned and the pillows and models were burned.

All through the lace-making centers of the Swiss countryside, Le Locle, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Aux Ponts, Neuchâtel, le Val-du-Ruz, Val de Travers, Valangin, Fleurier, Couvet, Bois-de-Crois, la Brévine, Bois-de-la-Halle, Aux Eplatures, Aux Verrières, Begnins, Geneva and all the pretty spots between, watchmaking and bobbin lace work prospered for many years. Here untiringly for twenty centimes a day, by tallow lamps after dark, worked the more industrious; here in the evenings the young gathered to work, sing and enjoy their simple refreshments; here dexterously plied their bobbins the secretive, gossiping elders with their lace-wakes and waffle-wakes held behind closed doors. Here the Suzette Lehnards, the Aimé Othenin-Girards, the Uranie Roberts, the Louis-Sylvains, the Adeline Cuendets, the Cecile Tattets, the Lucie Bobilliers, the Zelig Perrin-Montandons, the Lambelet-Colombs, the Zelig Hugenins, the Rosalie Jeanneret-Vauchers, the Jenneret-Riepkas, all skilled lace-makers, here they had produced their beautiful *clarets*, *filettes* and *blondes*, a pleasant and industrious company, all of them now vanished and remaining today only as part of a legend.



SWISS LACEMAKER'S HOUSE.