

## *Austrian Peasant Lace*

**A**USTRIAN PEASANT LACE. BY A. S. LEVETUS.

ONLY those who have travelled in the remote parts of the Austrian Crown Lands can form an idea of the richness and variety of the costumes worn by the peasants, and how largely lace and embroidery are used in their adornment. Nor is this beauty of costume and use of embroidery and lace confined to the women, for the men are equally fond of decorating their clothing with these embellishments, and in some places even embroider their own garments, though they leave the making of the lace to feminine fingers.

Each village has its own distinctive costume, and it is easy to tell by their garments the part from which the peasants come. Happily, in many districts the old traditions are still preserved — for example, in Slavonia, Moravia, Croatia, Dalmatia, Bosn'ia, and some parts of Bohemia, though among the Northern Czechs

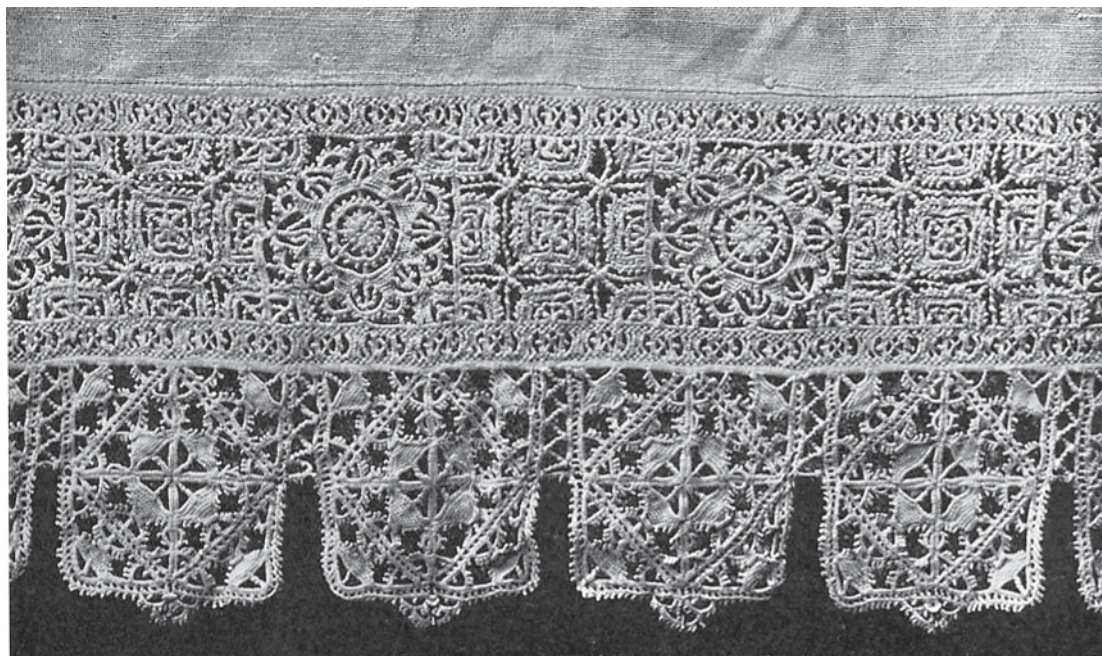


FIG. I. DALMATIAN PEASANT LACE

*(From an Altar-Cloth in St. Eustachius Church, Dobrota)*

16TH OR 17TH CENTURY



## Austrian Peasant Lace

“modern” fashion has ruled for nearly half a century. Where these races first learnt the art of embroidering and lace-making is not certain, and in many cases it would be useless to inquire. The Slavs, however, are peculiarly conservative, and continue to wear the same dress and observe the same customs as they did centuries ago.

Many of these national costumes are of great beauty, especially where the old traditions are still kept up, and it is a most interesting sight to see the peasants trooping out of church on Sundays and festivals, the women wearing linen aprons and head-dresses woven by themselves and trimmed with lace which they themselves have made. There is a great difference between the lace which the peasants make for their own wear and that made by them for sale. Indeed, the women and girls who make their own things are usually satisfied to do

other work than lace-making for a living. Every girl, rich or poor, spins her own linen and makes her own lace trimming, just as in England before the era of cheap machine-made embroidery and lace girls used to do their own crochet-work. It is really marvellous to what use the peasant girl puts the lace and embroidery she makes, and how it becomes a part and parcel of her very self. She never learns to draw, but has an instinctive feeling for ornament and style and an inborn sense of beauty. She is particularly felicitous in the invention of new stitches—in fact, no two women work alike; each has her own particular characteristics, just as every village has. Lace often descends as an heirloom from mother to daughter, and where there are several daughters, each makes her own and it forms part of her trousseau when she gets married. Every garment is ornamented with lace-drawn thread-

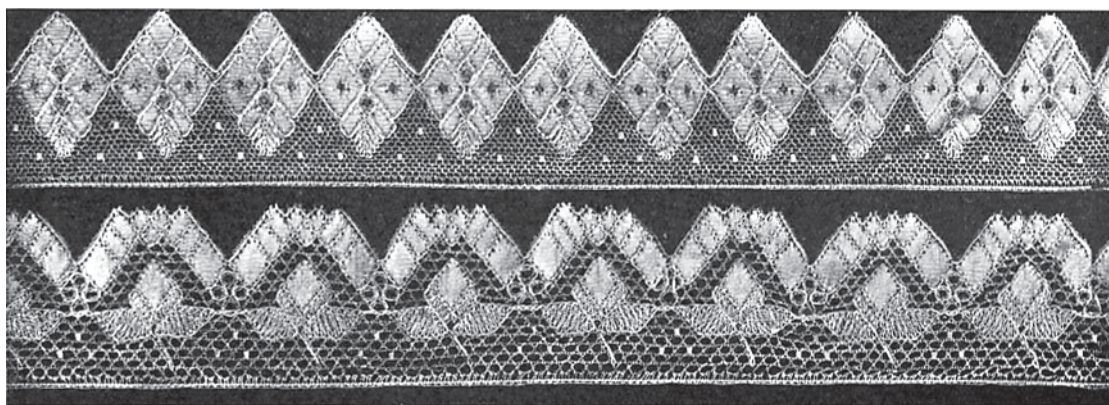


FIG. 2. (*Top*) BONE-LACE MADE AT THE LENSTERBURG FACHSCHULE

(*Bottom*) KÖNIGGRÄTZ TULLE LACE

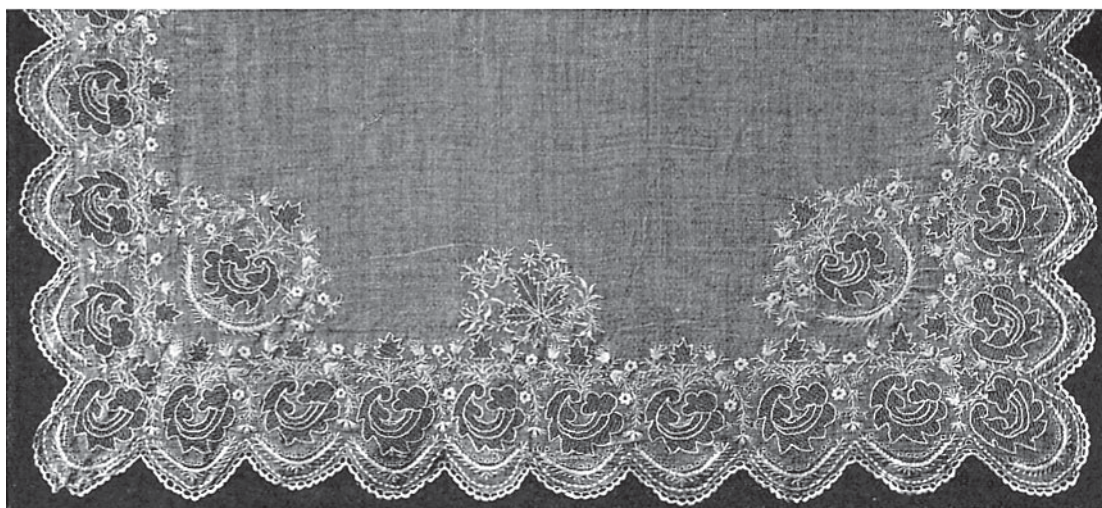


FIG. 3. PART OF A SLOVAK COLLAR

(*The property of Herr Krek*)

CURRENT MODE



## Austrian Peasant Lace

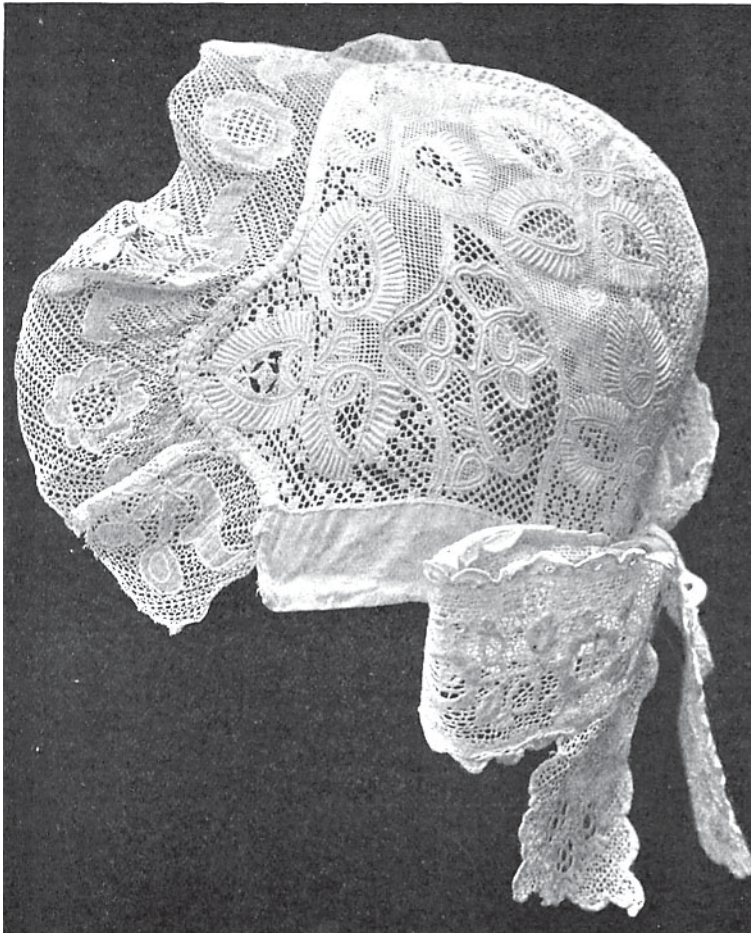


FIG. 4. BOHEMIAN EMBROIDERED HOOD EARLY 19TH CENTURY  
(In the Museum of Czecho-Slav Ethnology, Prague)

work, the sheets and pillow-slips are trimmed with lace, and so is the curtain which, during her married life, is to protect her from the "evil eye." In Dalmatia both sexes wear a kind of shirt trimmed with lace fronts, and, though these garments are always hidden from view, no pains are spared to make them beautiful. Even the very poor wear such garments, and to be without them would mean loss of self-respect.

Our first illustration shows a piece of Dalmatian peasant lace. It is part of an altar-cloth from the Church of St. Eustachius, in Dobrota, and dates from the end of the sixteenth or beginning of the seventeenth century. The same general pattern is still made by the peasants for their own wear. If examined closely, one can easily see that no special scheme has been followed and repeated, although at first sight the same pattern seems to recur, for there is a certain symmetry both in the border and in the insertion.

In the second of the two patterns shown in

Fig. 2 we have a specimen of the lace still made at Königgrätz, in Bohemia; for, as already mentioned, each district, and even each town and village, has its own style. In those parts where lace of a primitive kind is still to be seen, it is easy to follow the course of development in the various *techniques* by observing that worn in the different districts. Naturally, owing to the revival of interest in lace-making and the action of the State, Bohemia is far to the fore with modern patterns, which are made in the lace-making schools (see Fig. 15). But in parts where modern ideas have not permeated, and where the peasant is content to remain a peasant, the old traditions are not likely to die out soon.

Fig. 3 shows one end of a collar such as is worn at the present time by the women and girls in Slavonia. Each end is in form like half a handkerchief, and the collar is worn with the two

ends falling over the shoulders, something like a sailor collar, but fastened close round the neck. Here, it will be seen, a fairly successful attempt has been made to keep the pattern in the worker's eye; but closer inspection will show that, though the scallops resemble one another, the pattern as a whole varies greatly, particularly in the shape of the triple clover leaf, the emblem of good luck. It is undoubtedly a fine piece of work.

There is a remarkable diversity in the shapes of the hoods and caps worn by the women of the Austrian Crown Lands, as also in the different ways of ornamenting them. Of those embroidered in silver and gold I do not propose to speak, but some of those embroidered in white, with lace trimming, are exceedingly beautiful, and are regarded as great treasures. Special ones are worn on special occasions, and the most beautiful are made only to be worn when their owners appear before their Maker, and consequently very few of them are now extant.

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The one reproduced in Fig. 4 was destined for that purpose, but some accident or other saved it. The Czechs no longer wear these hoods, having discarded them when they discarded their national dress; but in Moravia, Slavonia, and other provinces hoods and caps are still worn, always of the same primitive shapes as in ages long past.

In Fig. 5, for instance, we have an example of the lace used in the Dalmatian head-dresses. Here fancy has had free play, and the result is a very effective piece of work. The threads have been carefully drawn and sewn round the pattern in cord-stitch, care having been taken to make the work as transparent as possible. No two of the *motifs* are alike, and in the clustering of the leaves there is great variation. The head-dresses for which this kind of work is used are only worn on great days, and are never washed, for that would be degrading them to every-day use. The number of different *techniques* these simple peasants have discovered for themselves is astonishing; it is as though they were always seeking and finding. In the form as well as the trimming of the head-dresses and caps there is great variation in different districts, though they all bear a certain family likeness to one another. The harebell, the apple, the heart, and the rose are favourite *motifs*; the cock, regarded as a bird of good omen which watches over all, appears in some form or other in all localities.

In Fig. 6 we have a portion of a churching or thanksgiving garment, such as is still worn in Wallachia. Such shawls are a necessary and important item in the outfit of every peasant girl. They are about three yards long, and are worn round the head, the two ends falling one above the other behind; and they also serve as coverlets at the baptism of the children. The pattern of this one, which is entirely embroidered in white silk, is exceedingly rich, and has the appearance of being perfectly symmetrical. All the Slavic *motifs* can be easily recognised in it—the heart, the apple, the rose, the clover-leaf: symbols of love, happiness, and plenty. The variety of stitches is astonishing, and the beauty of design and execution is heightened by the two plain stripes running between the insertion and lace. It must have been an arduous piece of work, spite of the fact that the peasant women are extremely dexterous with the needle.

In Fig. 7 we are shown a still rarer kind

of Wallachian lace, such as has not been made for the last fifty years, on account of the difficulty in executing it. It is made on exceedingly fine linen, and the fatigue in drawing the threads for the centre stripe must have been enormous. The *à jour* work is extremely delicate and beautiful, and on close observation it will be seen that the *motifs* of the borders and outer insertions resemble those in Fig. 6 with but slight variation. Fig. 14 is also from a Wallachian churching shawl. The two embroidered stripes are in Wallachian *à jour* work, the *motif* being the apple and clover-leaf, and fancy has again been allowed to have its will. Such embroidery, or lace as it is called, is of very ancient origin, and the art of making it is transmitted from generation to generation. The insertion connecting the two

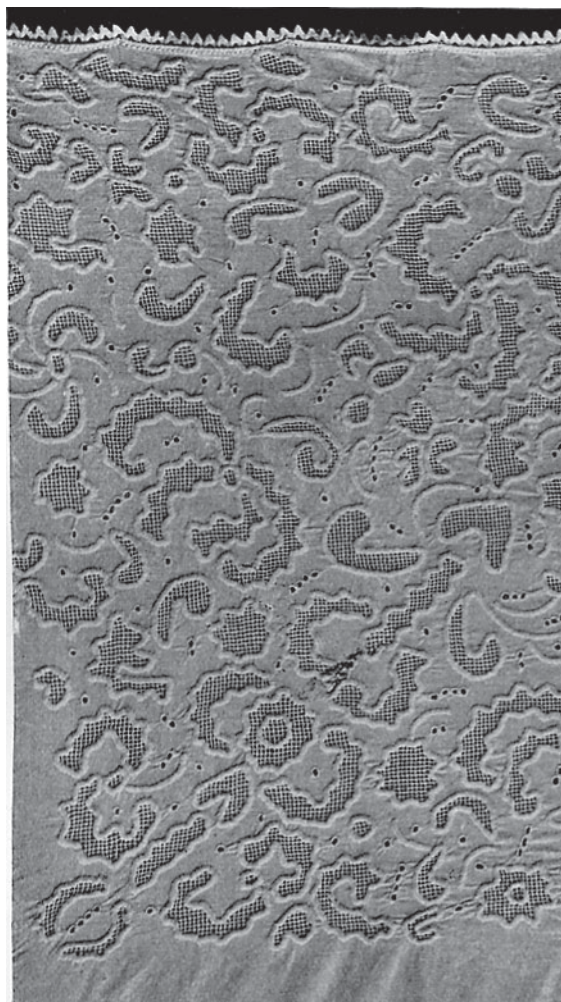


FIG. 5. PART OF DALMATIAN HEAD-DRESS MODERN  
(From the District Governor of Spalato)





FIG. 7. PART OF A WALLACHIAN  
CHURCHING SHAWL OR HEAD-DRESS  
PROBABLY EARLY  
19TH CENTURY  
(*The property of Herr Leopold Parma*)

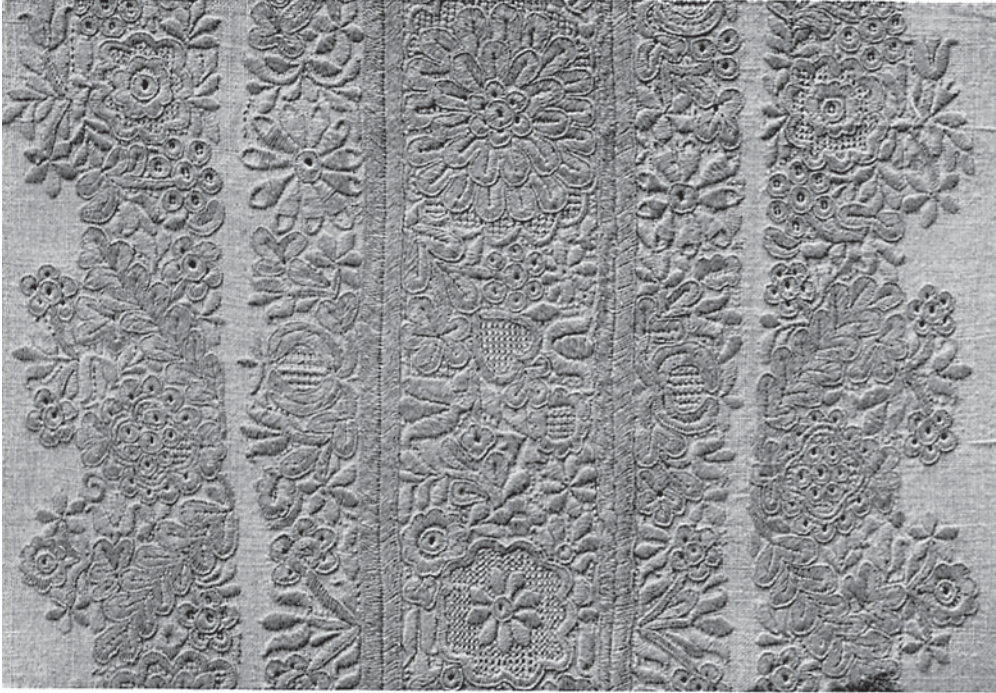


FIG. 6. PART OF A WALLACHIAN  
CHURCHING GARMENT  
FIRST HALF OF  
19TH CENTURY  
(*The property of Herr Leopold Parma*)



## Austrian Peasant Lace

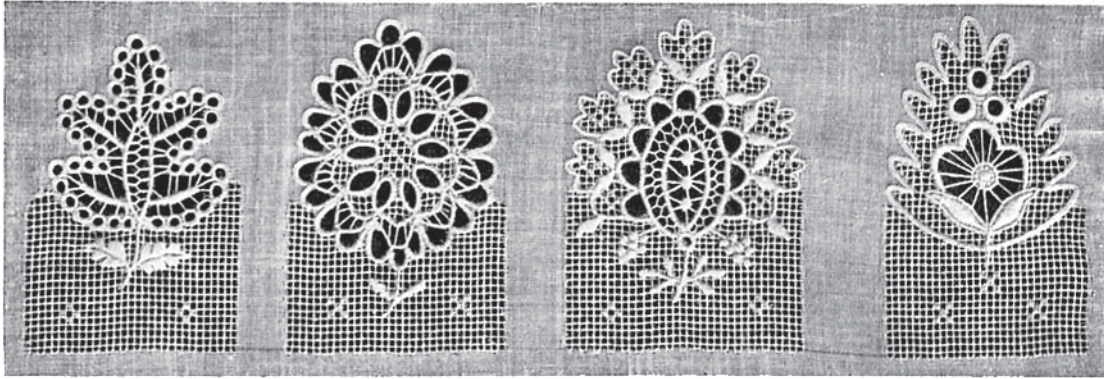


FIG. 8. WALLACHIAN CAP LACE

(The property of Frau Barbara Bubela)

FROM THE DISTRICT OF ROZNAU

stripes is Bohemian, for the Wallachians do not make this kind. The pattern is known as Valenciennes—a sort which is fast dying out to give way to newer methods and patterns.

Figs. 8, 9, and 10 show patterns of Wallachian lace used on the caps and hoods worn by married women. The lace is slightly gathered, so as to form a kind of frill, which falls over the forehead.

Such patterns are always drawn by the untaught hands of the peasant women, and chiefly represent leaves, buds, and flowers. After the patterns are worked, the threads are drawn from the linen upon which it is made, so as to form the open-work. This is extremely troublesome and arduous work, yet each woman makes her own, and positively refuses to wear that made by other hands. In Figs. 8



FIG. 9. WALLACHIAN CAP LACE

MODERN



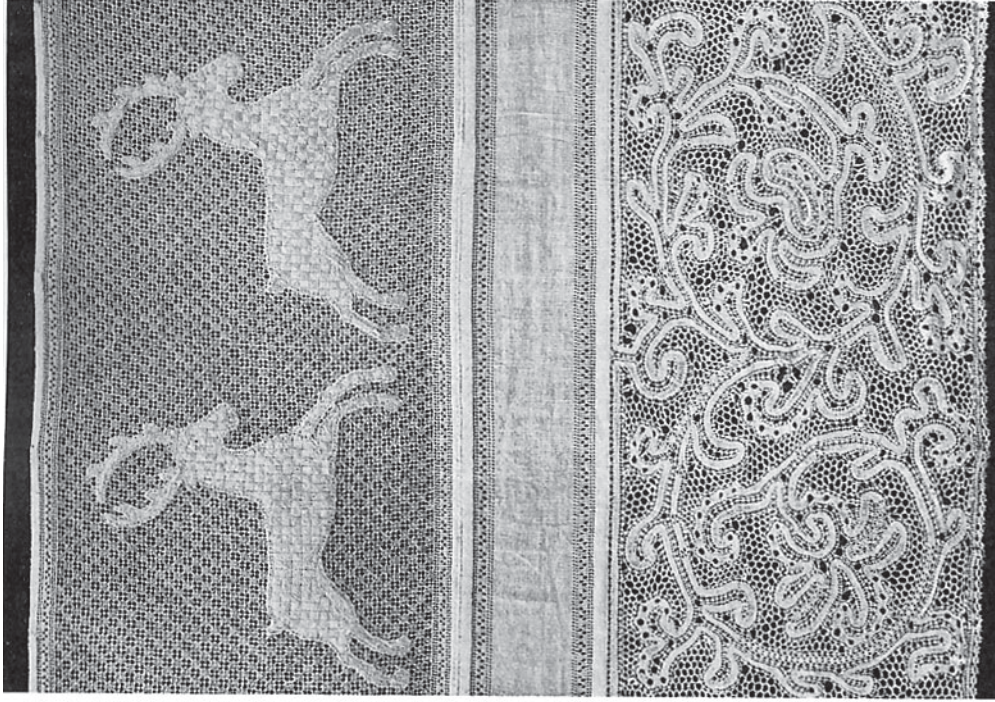


FIG. II. PART OF A BED CURTAIN  
(DISTRICT OF TREUCSIA)  
(*In the Czech Ethnological Museum, Prague.*)

17TH CENTURY



FIG. IO. EMBROIDERY FOR A WALLACHIAN CAP

CURRENT MODE



## Austrian Peasant Lace

and 9 the process can easily be traced. Fig. 10 exhibits the same process, though at first sight it may appear that the edges are made by piercing the holes with a bodkin and then working round them. It will be seen here, too, that there is a great variety in the number of stitches used for filling in.

In Figs. 11 and 12 we have curtains for a *lit d'accouchement*. From these it will be perceived how much the lace made in the Tyrol differs from that of the other Crown Lands. The bed always stood in a corner of the room, and the curtain served two purposes. It allowed the mother to see all that was going on without being seen, and it also served to keep off the "evil eye," ever a source of great fear to the peasant, even in our days. Only a short time ago, when in Croatia, I came in contact with a woman who was supposed to be a witch, capable of working mischief. She seemed a happy, harmless kind of creature, and laid out the contents of her marriage-chest for my inspection. They were most interesting, and

some of the things were very beautiful; and she, too, possessed the magic curtain to keep out the "evil eye." Many other superstitions are connected with such curtains. One is that a woman in confinement must not look out into the open without something intervening, or harm will befall her infant. The figure most often seen on these curtains is that of the cock, the bird of good omen. The stag seen in Fig. 11 is a very rare form of ornament. The threads must have been first drawn, and then, after the *à jour* work was filled in, the stags were probably worked in what is called full embroidery. The linen stripe is a very effective bridge to the lace, which is quite twenty inches deep. Here the ornament was first filled in, and then the threads drawn so that it appears as if the lace were made on a network foundation, whereas it is all done on one and the same piece of linen. The curtain would probably be about ten feet long, for it was slung over the bed-pole, the upper part forming a kind of draped valance. In Fig. 12

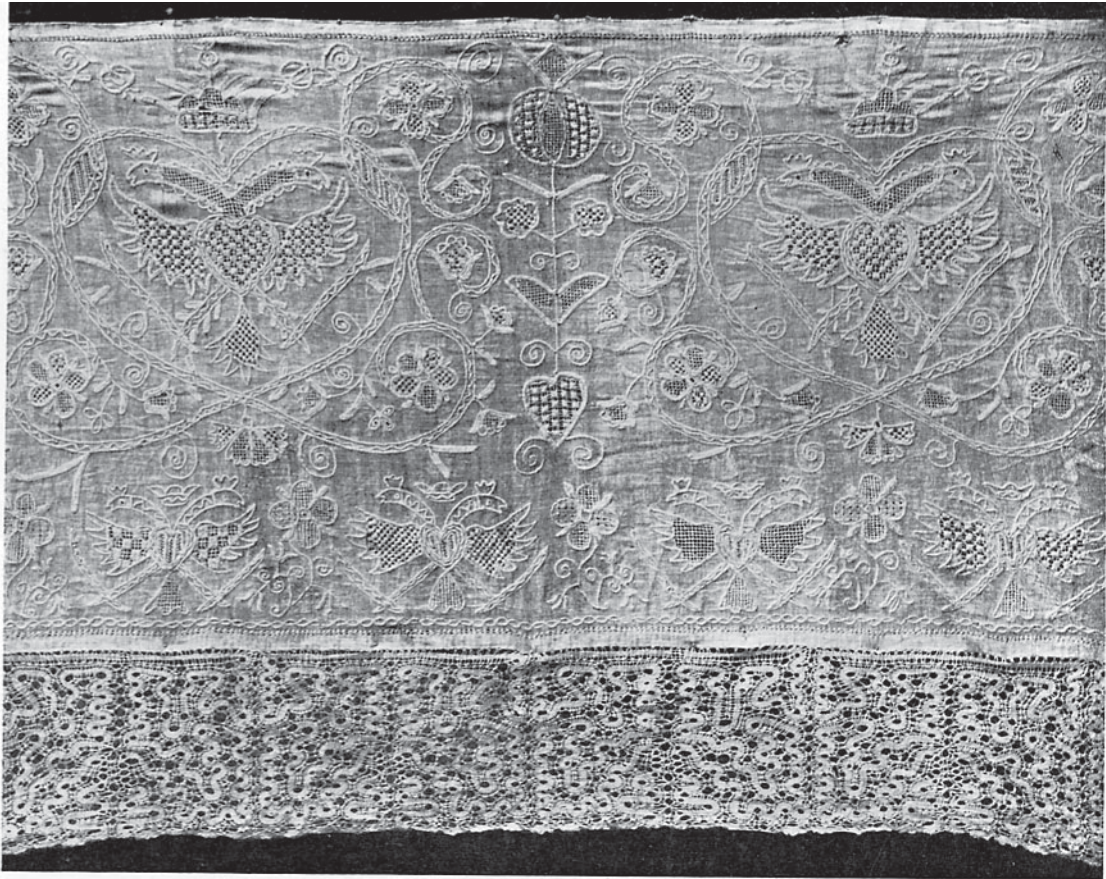


FIG. 12. PART OF A BED CURTAIN (TYROL)

PROBABLY 17TH—18TH CENTURY  
(In the Museum für österreichische Volkskunde, Vienna)





FIG. 14. PART OF A WALLACHIAN EARLY 19TH CENTURY  
CHURCHING SHAWL  
(The property of Herr Leopold Parma)

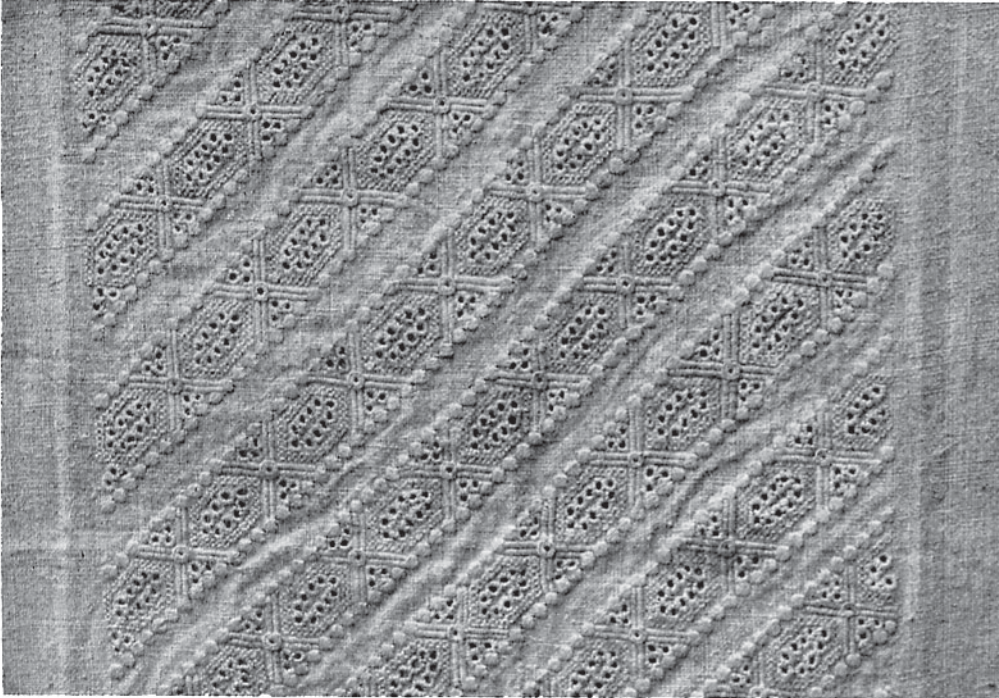


FIG. 13. PART OF A RUTHENIAN SLEEVE  
(In the Municipal Museum, Lemberg)  
CURRENT MODE



*The Staats Forbes Collection*

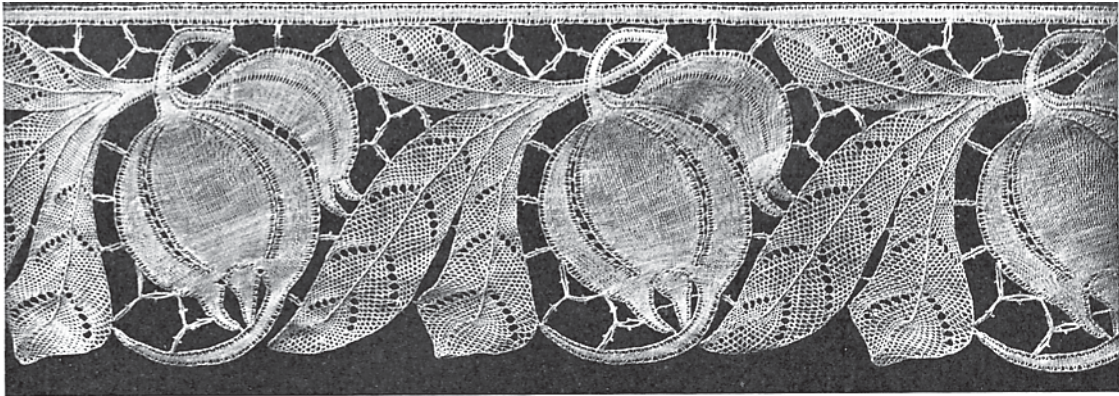


FIG. 15. MODERN LACE AS MADE IN LACE-SCHOOLS

DESIGNED BY FRL. HOFMANNINGER

the same *motifs* are used as in the Slav embroideries and lacework, with the addition of what seems to be a double peacock (or perhaps a double eagle) worked in *à jour* embroidery. The ornamentation contains both northern and southern elements, but the lace border is pre-eminently Slavonic, the patterns being common to this day in the Slav districts bordering on Hungary.

In Fig. 13 is shown part of a Ruthenian sleeve, such as the men wear to this day on their shirts. The pattern is a very ancient one, and is part and parcel of the national costume still worn. It is embroidered in wool on hand-made linen, the holes being pierced with a bodkin. This is a very fine specimen, and seems to have been made by someone with a practised hand and a trained eye. There are many kinds of like embroidery; in some the holes are square, such being cut with the knife and worked either in wool or thread; in all cases, however, it is called lace when worked in white and embroidery when done in colours.

The many uses lace is put to is quite astonishing, and it is always used in its right place. There are lace edges to sleeves, lace ruffs for the neck, lace aprons, lace petticoats, lace on bed-linen and on shelves. It is the peasant woman's chief adornment, and happy is she who possesses a store; it counts to her riches, as a priceless lace would to the greatest ladies in the land. When not in use for the purpose destined, it is safely kept under lock and key in the marriage-chest which the bride takes to her new home, and which stands by the bedside, where she can always have an eye on it.

It is a pity that the old costumes are giving way to modern modes in all directions, for the peasants look so much superior in their national garments; and it gives them a dignity peculiar to themselves—

a dignity which is lost, or at least not recognisable, when they conform to modern dress.

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