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and
various forms
of
**the Needlepoint
and Lace of Alençon**

by

M. Félix Boulard

Member of the Historical and Archaeological Society of Orne — France



Translated by Miss H. E. English





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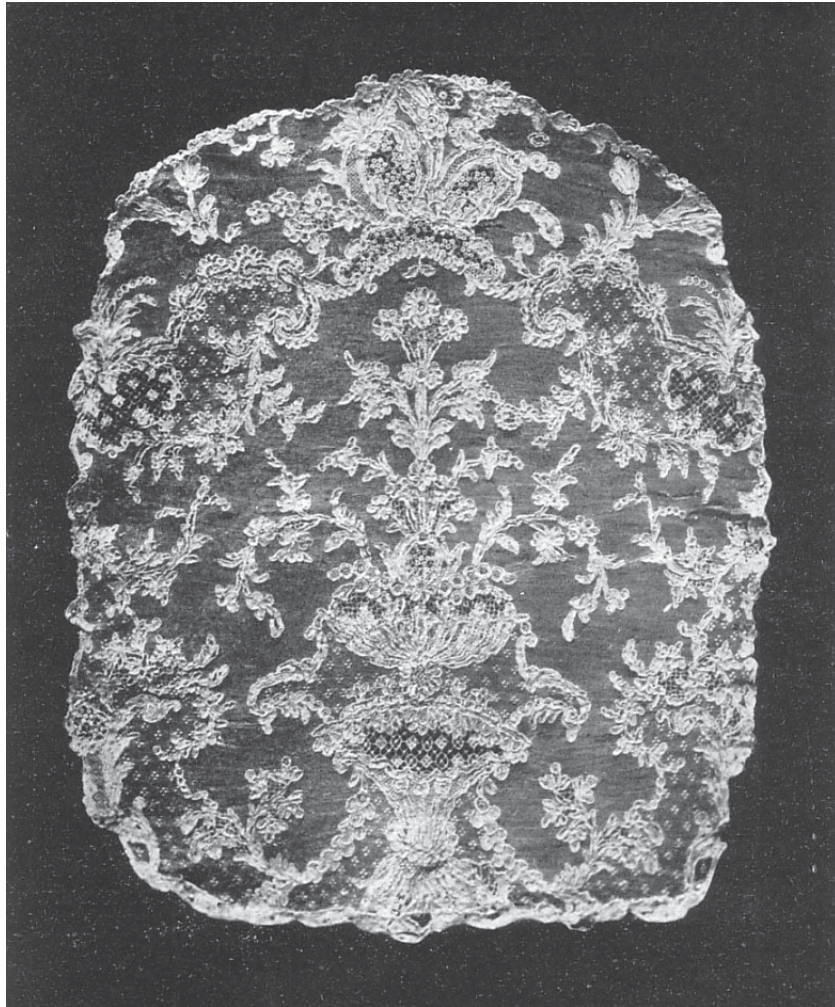


NOTICE TO READERS

More than ever anxious for the fate of our Lace industry, which is in danger, and whilst awaiting the practical steps which are now being taken, the Chamber of Commerce thinks that it is the moment to bring to notice everything which may forward the claim of Alençon Lace to public attention.

In this spirit the Chamber of Commerce deems the lecture which was given on February last, under the auspices of the Historical and Archaeological Society, to be in the front rank of importance, to be put to use without delay.

Indeed this lecture establishes not only local interest in our manufacture but also the important part played by our Lace in the declaration of the place which France takes in the domain of Art, unequalled throughout the world. But it is a pity that circumstances do not allow us to add to the text diagrams which were shown upon the screen during the lecture. In place of them, the few illustrations here given have only a slight connection with the lecture, but are however very suitable. Neither have the conditions imposed upon the printers made the task any easier.



LACE OF THE TIMES OF LOUIS XV.

FOREWORD

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

Our subject is a favourite one with the people of Alençon. So we are assured of your kindly welcome, which is a great point ; but we feel that we have need of it indeed. In fact, however agreeable in itself the object of which we are speaking may be, the technical ideas—with which the history of Lace is inevitably bristling—warn us to anticipate difficulties. We feel that a short lesson beforehand is indispensable to many here, who are complete strangers to the Art of Needlework ; we owe them a special duty in recognition of their kind attention. For that matter, we know that Alençon ladies (expert, like their ancestors, in the practice of needlework) are as kind as they are clever, and we do not hesitate to count upon this. Now let us talk upon Embroidery, Guipure, and Lace : What do these terms mean exactly?

Embroidery is the work of adding a supplementary ornamentation to linen, or material of some kind. Two things must be understood by this ; 1st : a previous support, remaining finally in the work. 2nd : an additional work, generally hand done. Common needlework—wrongly called Tapestry ; which has canvas as a foundation, overcast in wool, silk, etc.—is Embroidery.

Guipure (literally Tape Lace) is made without previous foundation, so to speak “ in the air, ” on threads like a spider’s web, the provisional support finally disappearing. Finished Guipure rests on nothing ; the motifs of the decorative part support each other by a mutual effort, either adhering together by direct contact, or attached by “ fils lancés ” or bars. Venetian Point and Alençon Point are Guipures.

Lace only differs from Guipure in that it has a foundation of net with regular meshes, on which are placed the motifs of decoration. The actual work of our Alençon lace-workers is a Lace. The foundation net, which is seen in the lace, is of three kinds :—

1. **The curled Tie**, with or without “ picots ” (loops).
2. **The twisted Tie**.
3. **The Reseau or Plain netted Ground**.

The curled Tie or Bride has hexagonal meshes with 90 to 120 buttonhole stitches to each mesh.

The twisted Tie has also hexagonal meshes, but instead of buttonhole stitches there is a single twisted thread round the sides of the mesh.

The Reseau Net Ground has no hexagonal meshes, but many rectangular ones, also strengthened by twisted threads.

This is all one needs to know to be quite ready understand easily what we propose to expound.

Let us gratefully acknowledge that, thanks to the fascinating art of a clever and industrious photographer we hope to amuse and instruct you at the same time ! Thanks are due, both to M. l'Abbé Duval and M. l'Abbé Pericat his worthy colleague and slide operator, for the splendid and fitting illustration added to our lecture.

We take advantage of this Foreword to bring particularly to your notice a date and a fact which should be firmly established in your minds. It was in 1665—remember this date—that Colbert opened the first royal lace factory at Alençon, making over to a company—of which he remained the head—the monopoly of an industry which up till then had flourished with perfect freedom in our town.



PART I.

Several Origins

The work of Art, done with a needle, which is with good reason the pride of Alençon is not as one might think a unique isolated achievement which appeared as a finished article one day in the hands of a happy skilful worker.

We propose to show you to-day how, in this species, we are in the midst of a real family of beauty whose members succeed each other through several centuries, in our native town. For that matter, the idea of this long genesis was not established without difficulties, at the first onset : our ancestors made history magnificently, doubtless, but they did not help historians. Research of documents and their interpretation are full of risks, sometimes lucky, sometimes not, from which the cleverest and most conscientious cannot flatter themselves they will always escape safe and sound. Also we do not hesitate to admit the doubt which we ourselves feel of the danger of leaving beaten tracks, to open up new views on an established history, which will prove to be to everybody's satisfaction. Warned by ordinary experience of the certainty of trouble as a result of our audacity, we can only protest our good faith, even if the future does not justify it.

Even the author of " L'histoire du Point d'Alençon, " Mrs. Despierres, whose enormous labour and her great success in practical and theoretical works are well known, did not always have good luck. First of all, let us render her special great honour, which is her due. For ten years she visited the offices of notaries, the town clerk, mayor, and hospital, record offices and libraries. She examined deeds, searched documents, and finally established the first solid foundations of this history, at the same time abolishing many legends. Even so she did not probe everything ; indeed she just neglected the quiet spot where the

key to the enigma had lain in waiting for the lucky seeker for five centuries.

You have heard how we had the good fortune to find the Embroideries of Marguerite de Lorraine at the Monastery des Clarisses, and to discover the true origin of our lace there, until then supposed to be in Venetian Point. The aforesaid Embroideries show us the first attempt at *Cut-work* and *Fillings-in*, going back at the end of the 15th century, far later than Italian work, to the appearance of the primitive beginnings of our wonderful needlework in Alençon itself. With their social status well fixed, the Embroideries of our celebrated Duchess place the inherited characteristics of our native lace in a positive form. Thus we feel we should give them the honour of first place. But in theory the mind perceives—over and above the said tangible evidences—more ancient origins still of our lace, as of all lace.

Does not *Net* represent the initial idea of the fairy-like work in which we are interested? Net, as gossamer-like and built up “in the air” in the same way as lace, without any support? Now *Net* goes back to the Pharaohs, at least. One design in relief on an Egyptian tomb shows two slaves busy making Net. Coarsely embroidered net doubtless soon followed the invention of plain net. A few threads, coloured or not, crisscrossed over the meshes, sufficed to form a more or less primitive design. One can imagine that the instinct for ornament innate in woman quickly incited man’s companion to thus embellish the plain net in some simple way. But we have to wait till the end of the 16th century before seeing a real work of art in *Flat Net*, to day fashionable under the name of *Cluny Net*.

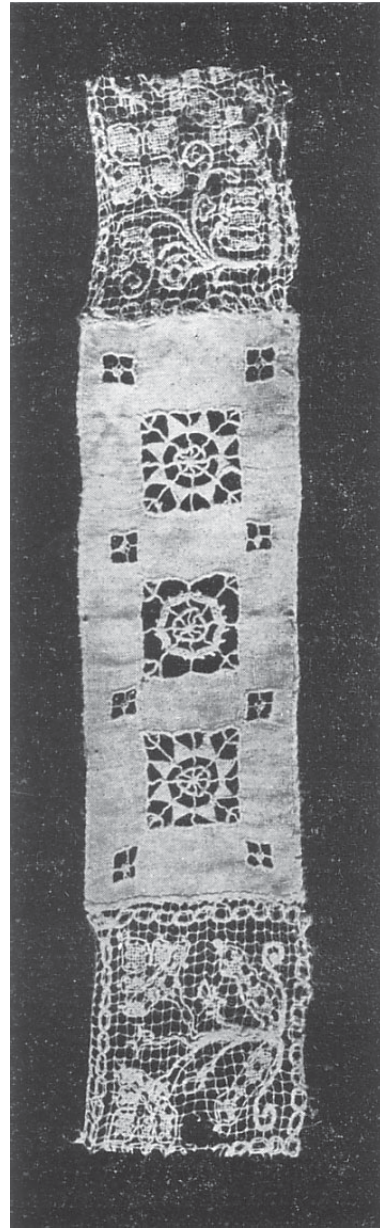
Embossed and Openwork Nets are less well known, in the making of which stitches are employed for the first time, which we shall find again in the various Laces, the buttonhole and twisted stitches.

We cannot leave the subject of net without speaking of *Lacis* or Network, an original work in vogue in the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries. This is a sort of fine net formed at the expense of the linen. Drawn threads in the warp or woof, following a regular plan, leave a kind of canvas of which the threads are then retied by a knot made with the needle, where they cross each other. On the foundation thus made embroidery can be worked

in all its ornamental variety. By employing linen the "Lacis" represents the transition between Net and Cutwork or Point Coupé at which we now arrive.

Cutwork is the first openwork embroidery made by sacrificing a solid foundation. The beginnings of ornamentation are obtained by working threads across the linen, according to a pattern, which are then overcast with buttonhole and twisted stitches. Then the linen is cut from under the designs thus made, which appear as openwork on the solid ground. From this comes the name of *Cutwork*. "It is not known to this day to what nation the invention of Cutwork should be attributed," says Mrs. Despierres emphatically in 1886. Since the discovery of the Embroideries of Marguerite de Lorraine, we have reason to think that Alençon is the home of its birth. Little by little the drawing of the linen threads has reached such perfection that the work has the look of a Guipure.

Cutwork shows a combination of buttonholed and twisted stitches not seen in embroidered net—this is the Venetian Stitch. We must note that this stitch is the antecedent of the famous work which bears the same name: the Venetian Guipure borrowed the so-called Venetian stitch from Cutwork.



EMBROIDERY

Towards 1650 in Italy, when Cutwork was given birth to the Venetian Guipure, the same phenomenon—in the same way—was producing the Alençon stitch for us. But a pause seems necessary to us here.

It is pleasant to think that through all these rather dull explanations you have followed the genesis of *Lace* up to now, which, starting with *Net*, is related through *Lacis* or *Darned Net* to *Cutwork* first of all and then to Guipure.

This is the first stage.

Without leaving the subject, we can now gratefully invite you to follow us into realms less difficult which will relax your sustained attention a little.

Certain among you know the “Pattern Books,” illustrated publications, which represented our own papers for Ladies’ Needlework, at the time. The first *Pattern Books* appeared at the beginning of the 16th century, immediately putting the fascinating invention of Gutenberg at the service of vanity. All these books contained designs of Embroidered Net and of Cutwork. In the time of the Valois the infatuation for underlinen embroidered, openworked, trimmed with lace, was such that the authors of some pattern books were monks, and even a recluse, in their seclusion strangely engaged in such a worldly vanity, from which apparently one could not escape anywhere.

Listen with what artless conceit the Italian Vinciolo offers his work to the public :—

“ The new and singular designs of the Lord Federic de Vinciolo, Venetian, for all kinds of work on Underlinen, dedicated to the Queen. All of them invented for the profit and contentment of the noble Dames and Young Ladies and other Gentlewomen who are fond of such an Art. ”

The Preface does not belie the promises of the title :—

“ The Lord Federic de Vinciolo to his Benevolent Readers—Salutation. Wishing to show you my goodwill towards France, which country has been so kind and favourable to me since the time when I quitted Venice, my own native country, I will not for anything deprive you of the honest and precious gifts with which Heaven has endowed me. For this reason, knowing myself perfect in a small talent, in which I have had good experience, and acquired honour in the land of Italy, I have been willing to depict the ensuing portraits (designs) for you, honoured readers. ” What

condescension to the French under François Ist! Might not one imagine that he is laughing up his sleeve at us? No, not at all. This foreigner is very pleased with himself, and does not fear to address a sonnet in the French language, to Du Bellay's fellow-countrymen :—

TO THE LADIES

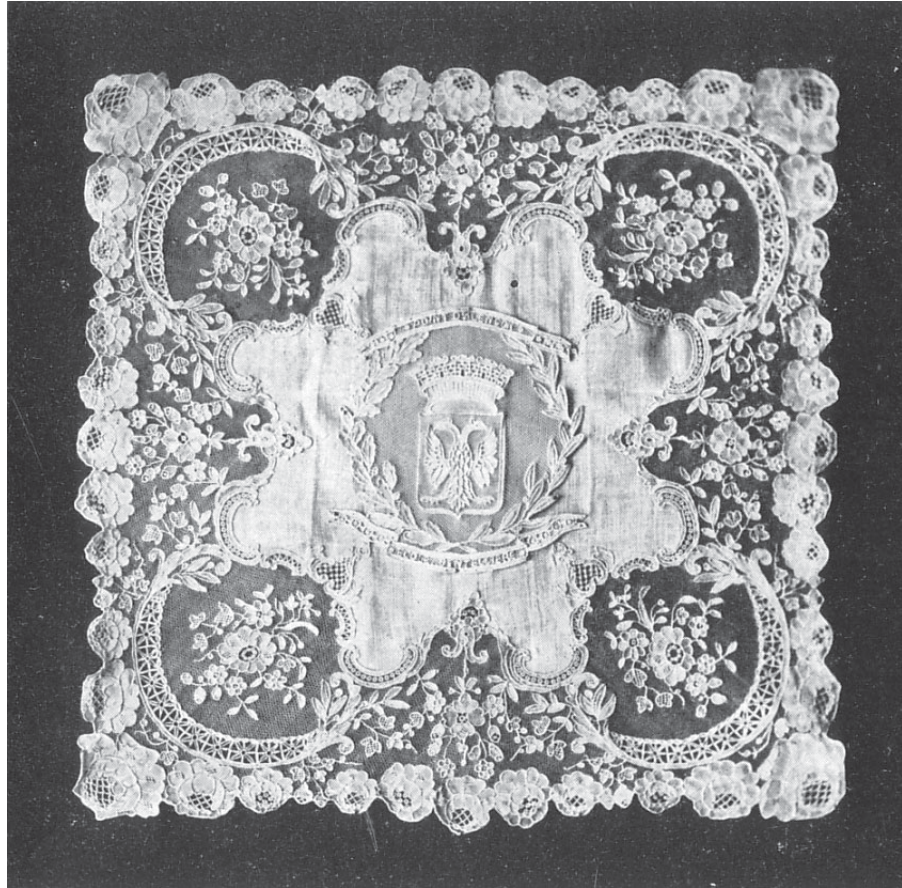
Some strive to gain the hearts of noble lords,
To possess at last great riches,
Others aspire to climb high in the service of the State,
And yet others have honours showered upon them by War.

But I am content to live humbly,
Just to keep away weariness,
And to do so well, that in my serious work,
I give up a vast content to the Ladies.

So I pray, take in good part,
These drawings which I dedicate to you,
And which will chase away your cares and entertain your mind.

You may learn much from this novelty
And later become mistress of this art,
The work is pleasant, and the field is vast.





MODERN LACE

PART II.

Various Forms of Alençon Point

Lacking any other merit, the verses of our grand Venetian will serve as a bridge to pass over to GUIPURE : does not Venetian Point claim to be the first Guipure and therefore the ancestor of Alençon Point? We will see how far this pretension can be upheld by a particular form of the Alençon stitch. But we know already that Marguerite de Lorraine's Embroideries show us the original beginnings of our native lace two centuries before the Italian Guipure.

But first of all what is a **Guipure**? Guipure is no longer an embroidery since it has its beginnings "in the air" without previous support, like the spider's web. Relieved of the restrictions of upright threads imposed on embroidered net or cutwork by the placing of supporting threads of linen or net, the vagaries of design in guipure assume every liberty, borrowing the motifs of ornamentation mostly from the Flora. Under the name of **Venetian Point** this needlework must have been done first of all in Italy from 1650 to 1660 says Mrs. Despierres, in her "History of Alençon Point Lace." She also assures us that the latter was started in our town about 1650. Alençon Point then may claim the same date of birth as Venetian Point. Now, whenever did children begin their existence at the same time as their parents? Can this unheard of genetic case be believed dispassionately, even with regard to a thing so fantastic and illusive as lace? We do not think so. We think simply that Venetian Point in Italy and Alençon Point in France have originated from Cutwork—their common ancestor, at the same epoch. Historians relate however, that twenty Venetian needlewomen were sent to Alençon by Colbert, to instruct our workers in the processes of their country, that these foreigners received a regrettable welcome, and

were maltreated by young men who apparently showed too much zeal in the defence of their native stitch ! The lot of these unfortunate Italians appears doubly sad and tragic. Indeed, whilst they were being welcomed to our shores in a very unexpected fashion, the Venetian Senate were issuing the following decree against them :—

“ If any artist or workman transfer his art to a foreign country to the detriment of the Republic, the order to return will be sent to him ; if he do not obey, his next of kin will be imprisoned so as to ensure his obedience. If he return, the past will be forgiven and employment found for him in Venice ; but if, in spite of his relatives’ imprisonment he insist on remaining abroad, an emissary will be instructed to kill him, and only after his death will his relations be set at liberty. ”

Thus recalled, it is to be understood that the Italians did not stop long with us, leaving so few traces that nowadays we have to seek them with a magnifying glass. For that matter their visit is only noted in 1665, after the founding of the royal manufactory of Alençon. Now at the same period the Governor of Alençon wrote to Colbert :—

“ A woman here, named La Perrière, some years ago found the means of imitating Venetian stitches to such perfection that what she did owed nothing to the foreigners. ”

Then, why were Venetians in a town where Venetian stitchwork had been known and very well copied for a long time ? At this time Fashion only recognized Italian Point, imposing its use upon all those whose rank and status exacted luxury or the keeping up of appearances. The richest of them were barely able to buy it, and the others deprived themselves of the necessities of life to obey this tyrant of fashion. A poet of that time says, in speaking of a certain coquette whose slender means could ill bear these ostentatious pretensions :—

“ She had no chemise,
But a beautiful rich gown
Of the most expensive Venetian Point. ”

Much concerned at a state of things which was ruining everybody and turning French money into Italian gold, Louis XIV.

resolved to ban Venetian Point. He promulgated an edict against foreign laces in 1660, which provoked Moliere to write :—

“ Blessed be this Edict again and again,
Which forbids luxury clothes ;
Husbands’ troubles will not be so great,
And wives will have a brake put on their demands.
How grateful I am to the King for his decrees!
And for the peace of these same husbands,
How I wish that Vanity could be treated
Like guipure and embroidery. ”

(L’Ecole des Maris.)

Such harsh measures, had, for that matter, no other effect than to excite the desire for the forbidden fruit, the King himself setting the example of disobedience to the famous decree!

Colbert then resolved to establish the manufacture of the inevitable Point in France, doubtless having previous information of what was going on in our country in this line. “ It is well known, ” says L. Duval, “ that Alençon Point is in no way a creation of Colbert. ” As the great statesman at this time was only seeking proficiency in workmanship, and its abundant production, he did not appear to be interested at first in this original work of Mrs. La Perrière, of whom more anon. He gave all his attention to the imitation of the Venetian Point as it came from the skilful hands of the Alençonnaises. This imitation certainly at the beginning, was only an exact copy of the Italian model, but little by little it became transformed, under the influence of French skill. **In the Alençonnaise Venetian Point** the enormous flowers in the Italian model diminish and become lighter, the heavy foliage trails capriciously, the decoration expands in every direction over a daintier foundation. Also, if for a time the work keeps its petal edges in light relief, it finally becomes flat enough for writers—rather stupidly—to compare it to Malines Lace. It is a new Guipure, for which Colbert has the honour, if not the merit, historians having given to the work in question the name of **Colberte** or **Colbertine**.

However, the great man whose fame is assured elsewhere, has nothing to do with this form of Alençon Lace. We feel quite able to prove this. Indeed we can show you the picture of a piece of Colbertine absolutely authentic, a piece which did not wait

for the opening of the royal factory by Colbert for its conception. This picture is on an old canvas, dated 1666 and signed by Pierre Allard, an unknown painter of the Angers school. The picture in question represents a person whom so far we have been unable to identify but who is wearing a jabot which one easily recognizes as *Colbertine*. The picture has been in our possession more than half a century, having been found in our town, Rue de la Gendarmerie, in the house of an old workwoman who let us have it for five francs! Chance is the good servant of the curious. She who unconsciously possessed one of the most interesting documents in the local lace industry, was far from realizing her good fortune, appreciated at its real value a few years ago only.

This centuries-old picture is here before our eyes, with its old frame and its smoky paint, from which a fine head and the precious guipure stand out. Such as it is in the poverty of its old age, sole witness of our present theme, it was preserved for us by a guiding Fate, having escaped the bullets of young madcaps who took it for a target, since it came into our possession ; do not ask me their names...

Because of its advanced state it is high time that it should at last find the safe shelter of some museum for Lace. We repeat that this old picture is a silent witness to the fact that Colbert had nothing to do with **Colbertine Lace**. Indeed the opening of the royal factory only took place in 1665, practically towards the end of the year. Now the guipure shown in the picture of 1666 cannot possibly be of later date than 1665 for such important work would not require less than a year for its execution. Moreover, one may add that such a transformation of the Venetian Point could not take place in a single year.

So, *Colbertine*, made before the royal manufacturing of it, owes nothing to Colbert. The latter adopted this kind of Alençon lace with marked favour, if one may believe the numerous portraits of the great man wearing superb collars of *Colbertine*. Anhyhow, this guipure is very interesting and very characteristic. It was restored in 1835 by the Bayeux manufactory, under the name of **Colbert Point**. Here, in Alençon, about 1877 one Mrs. Lambert made special efforts to popularize *Colbertine*. This work must be mentioned apart in the Alençonnais list. But it is not really this kind which should bear the name of Alençon Point. As a matter of fact it is only **Alençon Venetian Point**.

On the other hand Mrs. La Perrière, creator of the Colbertine, whilst applying herself hard to the work then in fashion to earn her living, had invented an original stitch, very different to the Italian work—about 1650. We are happy to show you a sample, fortunately handed down through the centuries, preserved with the greatest care in cases in the Museum at Ozé (1). Here it is, for you to see ; does it resemble the Venetian Point which you see by the side of it? Does it not look like a trial piece, a sample, so vague and tattered is it in design? These simple beginnings are not the equal in worth of the rich Venetian stitch, but let us see what is coming.

Abroad, this work took the name of Alençon Point, without delay, whilst with us it was known as Velin (Vellum), from the calfskin on which it was mounted. An Alençon woman, past mistress in the Art of Cutwork was worthy of all praise for her invention. Citizens, let us salute the gifted worker who made the name of Alençon known throughout the world. Will there never be found the tiniest block of granite in our quarries to honour the memory of *Mrs. La Perrière*? She did not die until 1677, having had time to perfect the real Alençon Point, “ which, ” says Duval, “ will continue to be made and sold in secret by Mrs. La Perrière’s pupils. ”

It had forms and designs which absolutely distinguished it from the Venetian in its dainty and varied motifs, very different from the Italian foliage, on gossamerlike grounds, with irregular meshes, and ornamented with picots (loops). One can imagine how it found its way into the royal factory through the hands of Mrs. La Perrière’s pupils who were bought up by the monopoly. It must have acquired rapid perfection in the beauty of its designs done by Masters, among others Bérain, and Lebrun, by order of Colbert. At the end of the 17th century it had finally attained such importance that it was almost the only local occupation. But it had lost its name of Alençon Point and had become **Point de France**.

From his high place in history Colbert is above all criticism, but he was not above curses. It is said of him that the mark of his character was a horrible violence in the welfare of others. It was felt too much here! Colbert did not hesitate to ruin the

(1) The object in question is No. 53 in the Museum Catalogue.

local industry which was very prosperous, to assure the success of the favourite stitch from its outset to the zenith to which he desired it to attain. He shut the workshops which might have continued to turn out work which was inferior to his ideal ; he forced all the local workpeople to work for the royal manufacture, condemning to misery those who could not follow this vocation. Of 8,000 laceworkers of all kinds, occupied in the region of Alençon on all kinds of needlework, 700 alone entered the King's workshops. What was the fate of the other 7,000? History was not interested in them... And as private individuals, under cover as they thought of the inviolability of the home, they followed a clandestine trade behind closed doors. Colbert ordered a house to house search, condemning the delinquents to a fine and imprisonment.

All the same, the affair did not proceed without resistance from the manufacturers who faced ruin, nor without riots of the masse. Colbert crushed all opposition, sparing no one : neither the Benedictines of Montsort, who were, however, treated with some care and due form " because of the privilege of the church, " says the chronicler : nor the Governor of Alençon, Favier-Duboulay, who seems to have forfeited his position through nobly requesting mercy for the victims.

One cannot help remarking with some astonishment that the royal decrees

" Forbid manufacture, selling or using of any stitches or needlework made with thread other than that manufactured in the royal factory. "

" To be happy and in the fashion
Everyone must cut his coat
According to the edicts of the King. "

No more embroidered net, darned net, cutwork, no more Venetian Point—Alençon Point ; neither in the homes of the workpeople, middle class, humble peasants, castles, nor in Charity work-rooms... The only authorized needlework is that of the monopoly, otherwise the *Point de France*.

One cannot be astounded that Colbert was execrated, and that, fearing a public demonstration, his funeral had to take place at

night! But the end of all surprise about the Point de France is not yet reached ; first of all, what was it? Mrs. Laprade, the author of a book of 400 pages, entitled simply *Le Point de France*, has not found it possible to give us a definition. Indeed, the difficulty is explained in a most extraordinary situation, for which the absolute power of Colbert is responsible. The great lacemaker of France wished to compel the use of a single and comprehensive name for all the lacework manufactured in various places, in the royal factories, whatever the processes and the kind of work. This measure is so abnormal that we desire to lay stress upon what we say.

In her *History of Alençon Point* Mrs. Despierres tells us clearly :

All the productions, of whatever kind, had to carry the name of **Point de France**.

Thus, all that the monopoly had bought up : Alençon, Aurillac, Arras, Le Quesnoy, Reims, etc., whether needle or bobbin work, became instantly *Point de France* by the King's will, *sic volo sic jubeo*...

We look on, stupefied at such disorder, organized by the State, just at a time when in other ways French thought was demonstrated by such method and clearness of vision. Whatever it may be, there is no need to try to define such a polymorphous object as was the *Point de France*, generally. We must restrict ourselves to saying what it was at Alençon.

Two kinds can be distinguished. First, the *Colberte*, with its Venetian designs, encircled with foliage more or less dainty. In 1676 we find it in a portrait of Colbert by Nanteuil. Afterwards it found very little favour in the 18th and 19th centuries. The second kind of Point de France, here, was the *Point d'Alençon*, which differs entirely from the Venetian, originating solely from Mrs. La Perrière's own invention, with its quiet motifs, scattered on net which is of the utmost importance. The designs are of a symmetry unknown in Italian work. This form, so suitable to French taste, carried it off much better than the other, finally monopolizing the fashion.

It is time to notice how by a reversal of the order of things Venice came to imitate the Alençon *Point de France*. Fashion,

helped by the decrees which closed our frontiers to foreign workers, had ended by ruining Italian trade in our country.

“ And our neighbours, defrauded of those base tributes
Which the luxury of our towns paid to their art. ”

did not willingly accept their industrial defeat. All the more as it extended to the whole of Europe, which was now under the sway of French fashions.

Recently recalled from Alençon, of what use could the Venetian needlewomen be to their country at this critical time? It is certain that at this period an entirely new kind of needlework appeared in Venice, which sought to imitate ours.

In its turn Venice vied with us in its endeavour to capture the lace market, manufacturing *Venetian Alençon Point* from then onwards. It is still made at Burano, on the Venice canals, with comparative success.

Of course we must take care not to draw from this fact, in a spirit of revenge, the conclusion that *Venetian Point* originated in *Alençon Point* ; we may simply state that a particular form of the Venetian stitch came from ours.



PART III.

Various Forms of Alençon Point

Now the meshes of *Alençon Point*, shedding their loops, became more and more regular, and finally took the hexagonal form in its perfection. In this new state Alençon Point became a Lace. This is the moment to notice the difference particularly between Point and Lace. Writers have always failed to make it clear, so making regrettable confusion in the history of the Art of Needlework. **Point** is a Guipure, that is to say work with a very irregular foundation, formed of bars or ties placed hap-hazard between the motifs of the design ; for example Venetian Point, Colbert and Alençon Point.

Lace differs from *Guipure* and consequently from *Point*, in the foundation of net of a regular mesh, either of ties or plain netted ground. The foundations seem to have been entirely of *Brides* or *Ties* towards the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th century, with hexagonal meshes—each one festooned with 90 to 120 buttonhole stitches. This was the **Alençon Buttonholed Tie**, so extremely solid that it gave to Alençonnais work the name of “ Everlasting Lace. ” The Alençon manufacturers preferred to have it made at Argentan, a town where the workwomen specialized in this part of the work. It is known that Alençon Lace passed through many hands, each worker always doing a certain stitch in each locality. So, the Plain Ground or Foundation, was made at La Lacelle, Carrouges, Ciral and Pré-en-Pail ; the *Rempli* at La Roche-Mabile ; the *Fillings-in* and fancy stitches at Damigny ; the *Tie* at Argentan, etc. The putting together of the separate pieces and the work of assembling the whole was done at Alençon, by the hands of real fairy laceworkers competent to work all the stitches.

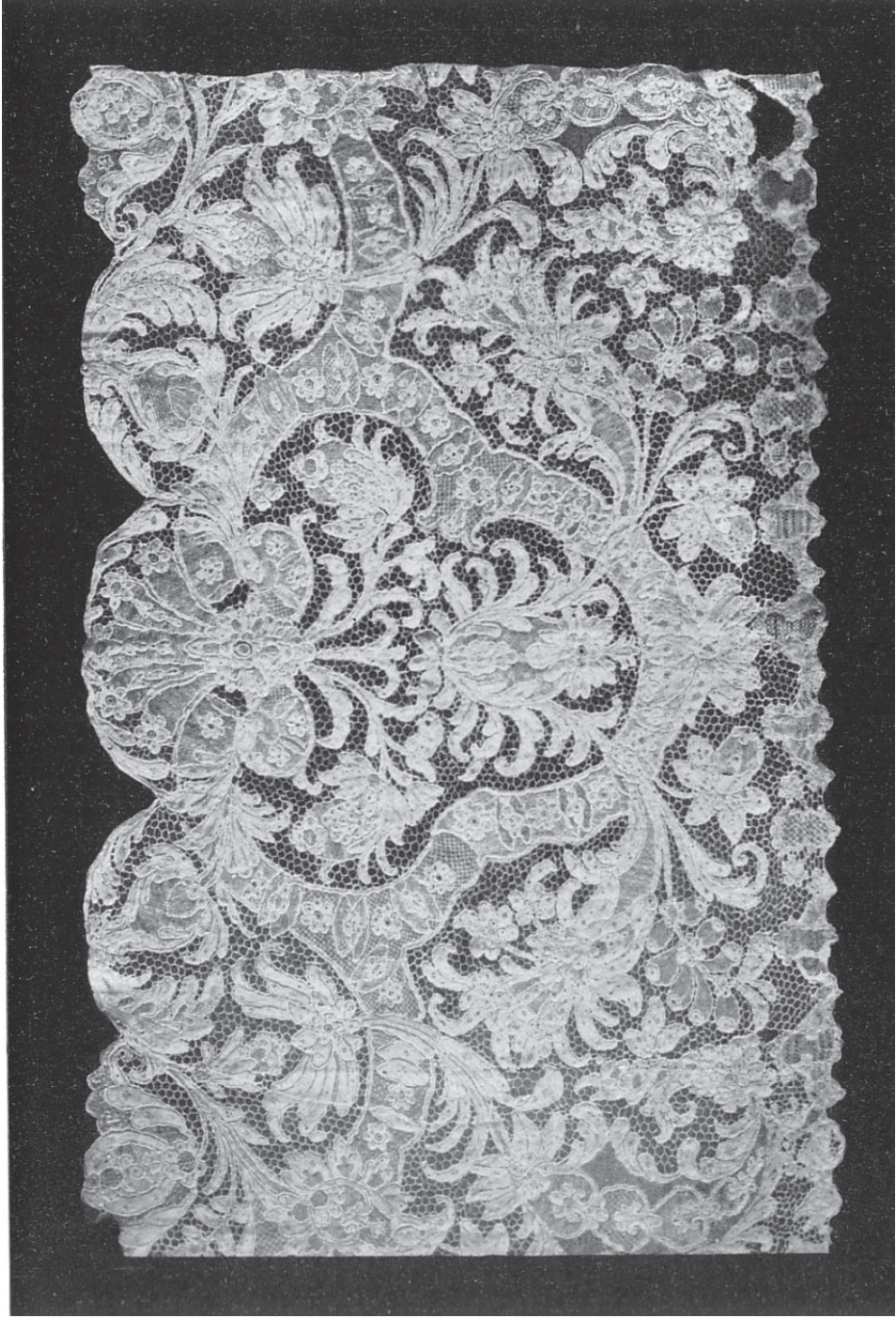
But let us turn back to the Buttonhole Tie, no doubt made in

Alençon the town of its origin, but more especially in Argentan. One day it happened that a work woman of this latter town apparently weary of the formidable task of working each mesh of net with 90 to 100 buttonhole stitches was content just to twist a thread round the sides of the hexagon : and the *Twisted Argentan Tie* was the result! Realizing the economy in labour, the manufacturers of Alençon caused the Argentan Tie to be adopted at once the organization of the work continuing to function in common between the two towns as in the past. It happened eventually, that all work with a Tie foundation, even that of Alençon Ties and made in that town, began to take the name of *Argentan Point or Lace*, towards the end of the 18th century. Etiquette is easy in industrial practice and favours competition, but nevertheless in theory Argentan Lace is nothing more than Alençon Lace.

However, whilst Argentan was simplifying the Alençon Tie, our own town was trying another economical net, the **Réseau**. This means a net with rectangular meshes strengthened by twisted threads like the Argentan tie. Without completely discarding the tie, Alençon prefers to apply itself to the making of this net today. As the aforesaid “ Réseau ” gives quite another aspect to the lace to that of the Tie, it has contributed a great deal to the fortune of the so-called Argentan lace, through the difference in the appearance of the kinds in question. To day it is with this lace of the réseau ground that the different kinds of work are completed, and to which the manufacture of Alençon can directly lay claim.

So as to resume, in precise and striking manner, a lesson more or less understood and grasped, too full of explanations for the object of it to stand out as it should, we will show you in chronological order sundry models created by the Alençonnais lace-industry.

1. First of all the **Colberte, Colbertine, or Colbert Point**, which originates from the Venetian and to which it shows evident resemblance.



LACE OF THE TIME OF LOUIS XIV.

2. Next, **Alençon Point**, the original work of Mrs. La Perrière ; from which all the ensuing forms came, so suited to French taste.

3. **The Point with the Buttonhole Tie and Loops** which alone has kept the name of **Point de France**, down to our own time. It is a transition, midway between guipure and lace ; polygonal meshes which are very irregular at first but end by giving an appearance of perfect regularity.

4. **Alençon Lace with the Buttonhole Tie without Loops (Picots)**, in which every even mesh has 90 to 120 buttonhole stitches. The solidity of the mesh thus strengthened, gave the name of “ Everlasting Lace ” to the work. It is this form which especially made our city world-renowned, the hexagonal-meshed net remaining always a feature of the industry designated “Alençon. ”

5. **Alençon Lace with the Twisted Tie.** The vogue for this labour-saving work was the cause of the name “ Argentan Lace ” being given to all work composed of Ties or Brides, even if made in Alençon, as Argentan specialized in the manufacture of these Ties.

6. **The Present Alençon Lace** of to day, reduced to the Réseau or Plain netted ground as a foundation.

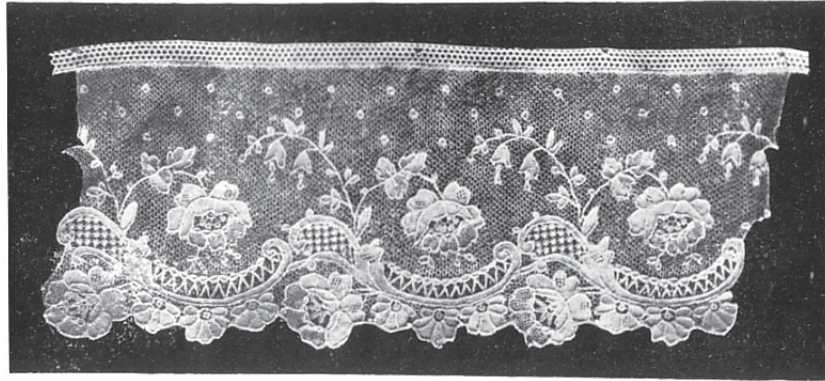
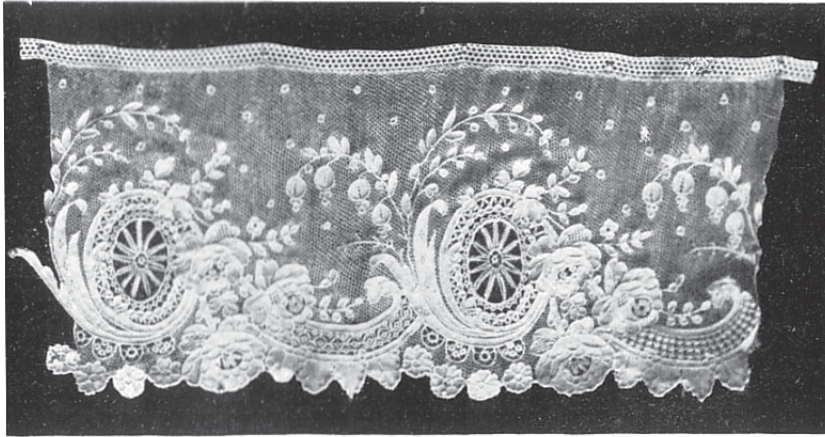
In spite of its grace and delicacy it may seem uninteresting, not varied enough in design, mostly made of slender garlands and the tiniest flowers ; it is lace in miniature. Lovely it may be, but is not this ancient model noble and full of simple grandeur also? It dates from Louis XIV. (1).

Fellow Citizens, do you not think it would be a deed worthy of Alençon to restore the entire range of work shown here, in our local manufacture, beautiful work of such variety that it must please all tastes (2)? Alas! we are far from the realization of this wonderful programme, we have scarcely anything but the memory of our ancient splendour left us to day.

But it is not the moment to despair. Fashion is turning once more towards lace, and more and more the attention of public Powers and bodies is drawn to the national question of artis-

(1) The model in question is No. 74 in the Museum Catalogue.

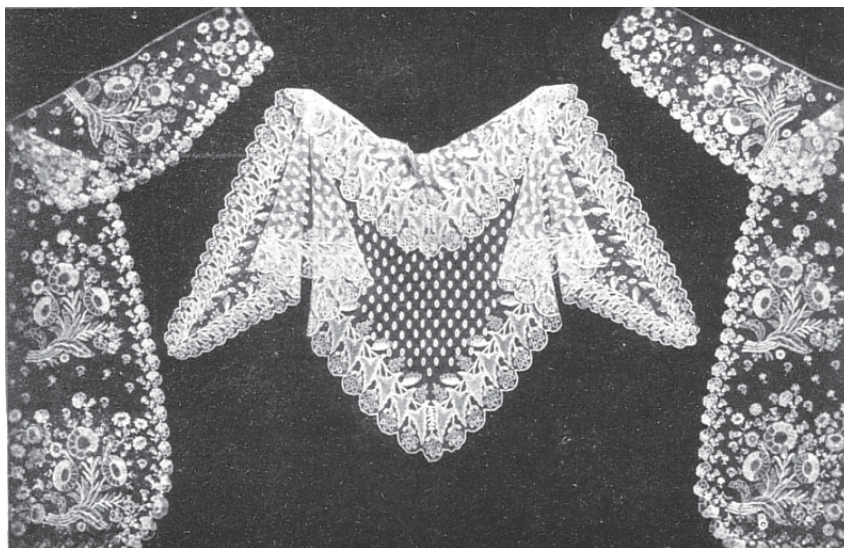
(2) The Chamber of Commerce has agreed to this desire, and is studying the means to gratify it.



tic industries. Indeed they alone are capable of reconstructing the special centres where the latter could be revived and prosper as in olden times. In particular must we note the awakened zeal of departmental and local administrative bodies; Chamber of Commerce, Board of Trade, Town Council, etc., show a decided tendency to find the means for the longed-for renaissance. Whatever may be said, modern society cannot do without luxury trades, unless the amenities of civilization are to be deliberately renounced; but we are not Spartans! We desire a pleasant world for all, where work is honourable, but where the joy of life persists. We have this world in France! Shall we not keep it? Let us then be hopeful, particularly we who are gathered here this evening to show our sympathy with and zeal in the cause of Alençon Lace. It is the right time to console ourselves for a passing eclipse, to show how Alençon Point was imitated more or less if not absolutely copied by all the manufacturers of needlepoint in France and even abroad. But we lack time to dwell upon a statement which moreover belongs to the history of the lace industry. We must confine ourselves to noticing that all needlepoint has its common origin in Alençon Point, from La Flèche to Sedan, passing through Paris, from Bayeux to Issoire. Like a devoted mother Alençon is unceasingly proud of her offspring, in its turn celebrated too. Her only complaint is of non-recognition, claiming simply her proper place at the head. And, bending gracefully from her ancestral hauteur Alençon bids farewell with a smile.

In 1858 manufacturers and journalists fought over the use of cotton in place of the time-honoured flax thread in the making of lace.





FICHU EN DENTELLE D'ALENÇON

Ce fichu, selon la tradition, aurait appartenu soit à Marie-Antoinette, soit à la Duchesse d'Angoulême (Musée d'Alençon)



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ALENÇON (Orne) — France