Alençon Part I. By M. Jourdain

A very full and accurate account of Alençon lace has been given by Madame Despierrès* in her Histoire du Point d’Alençon, and the revival of interest in the national lace industry noticeable latterly in France is responsible for a new work on the subject, Le Point de France, of Mme. Laurence de Laprade,† which reproduces at length many interesting documents. The history of no other lace-centre has been so exhaustively treated; and anyone interested in the historical side of the

with the development of the design of Alençon, and the process of its manufacture.

Colbert’s attention was directed to the immense amount of money that was sent out of the kingdom; nor must his personal inclinations and tastes be overlooked.‡

Alençon, in Normandy, was chosen as one of the seats of the new manufacture, because the lace industry was already widespread among the peasants. Point coiffé had been made there at an

≡ "Dès 1650 Colbert s’initia, lui aussi, à la culture de ces beaux-arts qu’il devait un jour protéger avec tant d’efficacité. Envoyé par Mazarin à Rome, à Florence, à Gênes, à Turin, s’il échoua parfois dans les missions diplomatiques ... du moins ne négligea-t-il aucune occasion d’accroître les richesses artistiques de celui dont il représentait et les goûts fastueux et la politique astucieuse."—Les Manufactures Nationales.

† Le Point de France. Mme. Laurence de Laprade. 1904.

Early Alençon Louis XIV. (late 17th Century) Ground of Hexagonal Brides
early date, possibly introduced by Catherine de Medicis,* to whom Charles IX. had given the Duchy of Alençon. About 1650, according to Points de Venise were successfully imitated and introduced into Alençon by "Une femme nommée La perriere, fort habile à ces ouvrages,"† thus

Madame Despierrers, it appears from a letter of Favier-Duboulay intendant of Alençon that causing the gradual disappearance of point coupé.

More than eight thousand persons were employed


in lace-making in Alençon, Sécz, Argentan, Falaise, and in the neighbouring parishes.

It is no doubt to this long apprenticeship in lace-making that the supremacy of Alençon among French laces is due. An ordinance of August 15th, 1665, founded the manufacture of Points de France, with an exclusive privilege for other foreign countries; and on March 17th, 1668, Iteratives—prohibitions—to wear these, as injurious to a manufacture of point which gives subsistence to a number of persons in this kingdom. In 1670, an Englishman travelling in France notices the efforts of the French Government to protect the Points de France. « They are so set (he writes)

ten years; a company was formed, and the manufacture realised enormous profits until 1675, when the monopoly expired and was not renewed. The new manufactures had the advantage of high-handed protection on the part of the Government. On November 17th, 1667, appears a fresh prohibition of the selling or wearing of passements, lace, and other works in thread of Venice, Genoa, and in this country upon maintaining their own manufactures, that only two days ago there was publicly burnt by the hangman a hundred thousand crowns worth of Point de Venise, Flanders lace, and other foreign commodities that are forbid.” Later, in 1680, it is stated in Britannia Languens that the

laces commonly called Points de Venise now come mostly from France, and amount to a vast sum yearly. In 1687, again, the fourth Earl of Manchester writes from Venice of the excessive dearness of the point made there, but is confident, either in Paris or England, "one may have it as cheape, and better patterns."

It is certain that the Italian style continued in vogue for the ten years of the monopoly.* There were Venetian workwomen to the number of twenty at Alençon in October, 1665,† and in the same month a letter to Colbert is sanguine enough to hope to produce in a short time from the royal manufacture "des échantillons qui ne céderont en rien au véritable Venise." In 1673 these hopes are apparently justified, and Colbert is able to write to the Comte d’Avaux, who has sent him a point collar in high relief, that the French points can bear comparison with the products of Venice.‡

The detailed chronicles of the new Points de France describe them as having a floral design, *bridges à picots* and with "little flowers over the large, which might be styled flying flowers, being only attached in the centre."§—the fine raised work of flying loops, upon delicate rose points. The design, again, is exactly that characteristic of Venetian scroll patterns. "The flowers,‖ which are in higher relief in the centre, and lower at the edge, are united by small stalks and flowers. The manner of disposing the branches, called 'ordonnances,' is of two kinds: the one is a twisting stalk, which throws out flowers; the other is regular—a centre flower throwing out regular branches on each side."

The development of the new points was watched by Colbert, who writes, in 1682, that their principal defect is that they are not so firm or so white as the rival points of Venice.*

Before the expiration of the privilege, the artists who furnished designs for all works undertaken for the Court of Louis XIV., must have supplied patterns for the Royal manufacture. In the account of the King’s buildings is the entry of a payment due to Bonnemer and to Bailly, the painter,† for several days’ work with other painters in making designs for embroideries and points d'Espagne. These designs were jealously protected. None had permission to make the fine point of the royal pattern, except those who worked for the manufactory, and all girls must show to the authorities the patterns they intended working, "so that the King shall be satisfied, and the people gain a livelihood."‡ That bridges with picots, as well as *bridges claires*, were made in the Royal fabric, is mentioned in the *Mercure* of July, 1673.§

After the expiration of the privilege (1675) the "fabricants" had designs specially made for them, which became their exclusive property. In 1680, they asked, and obtained, permission to prosecute certain small manufacturers who copied their patterns,‖ and in 1691 they speak of the "licence" of several manufacturers, who copy the designs of others instead of using "tout leur esprit et tout leur industrie à inventer de nouveaux dessins et des modèles plus parfaits et plus délicats."¶

* 1665—1675.
† Lettre à Colbert, tome 122, f. 75 (Bibliothèque Nationale).
‡ En Janvier, 1673, M. le Comte d'Avaux ayant remplaci Mgr. de Moncey comme ambassadeur à Venise, Colbert lui écrit: "J'ai bien reçu le collet de point rebrodi en relief, que vous m'avez envoyé; et que j'ai trouvé fort beau. Je le contenterai avec ceux qui se font dans nos manufactures, mais je dois vous dire à l'avance que l'on en fait dans la royaume d'ainsi beaux."
§ 1677.
‖ 1678.
¶ "Le Point de France. Mme. Laurence de Laprade.

(To be continued.)