



FIG. 1. NEEDLEPOINT: VENETIAN, SECOND HALF OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

THE BLACKBORNE COLLECTION OF LACE



FIG. 2. THE WOODCHOPPER AND THE BUTTERFLY. NEEDLEPOINT: POINT D'ALENCON, FRENCH, MIDDLE OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

THAT it was possible to acquire the Blackburne Collection of lace in so short a time after a subscription list had been opened, shows the interest of the Museum's

generous friends in the development of its collections. The Blackburne Collection, thoroughly representative in itself of all periods of lace manufacture, when added to the examples already the property of the Museum, places its collection distinctly in the first rank.

As the Blackburne laces, in the exhibition recently opened in Gallery E 8, and continuing for several months, have been arranged in chronological order, an excellent opportunity for comparative study is afforded. In this connection, a few notes upon the history of lace may be of interest.

The youngest of the textile arts, the lace

industry, developed its technical processes and artistic principles at a time when the other classes of textile manufactures had for centuries been firmly established. Its period of highest development, therefore, does not go back farther than the last part of the sixteenth century. It is convenient, disregarding modern lace, to date this period 1580-1881, and to divide laces into the following groups: Late Renaissance (late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries); Baroque (seventeenth century) and Rococo (eighteenth century), a useful classification suggested by Dreger.*

The most important countries for lace have been Italy (especially Venice), France, and the Netherlands. Italian preëminence in the late Renaissance is clearly shown by the laces produced then, particularly in Venice where important laces seem to have been first made. These old laces, made in the most luxurious city of the late Renaissance, usually can be dated with exactness by comparison with the Venetian sample books of patterns of 1596 and 1600. The typical geometrical pattern (*reticella*) and the free-hanging, clearly outlined, foliated pattern (*punto in aria*) are thoroughly in the orderly style of the Renaissance. The Blackburne Collection contains numerous examples of these laces, among them—the most important piece in the collection—a unique representation in thirteen panels of the story of Judith and Holofernes (fig. 3). The Portuguese inscription indicates that even in the early years of the seventeenth century

* *Die Wiener Spitzen ausstellung*, 1906.



FIG. 3. JUDITH AND HOLOFERNES. NEEDLEPOINT: PUNTO IN ARIA. ITALIAN, VENETIAN, ABOUT 1600

Venice exported laces to distant countries. Another piece of lace in this collection, purely decorative in its design and remarkable for the rhythm of its lines, suggests the influence of Venetian bookbinding designs under Oriental influence at this period.

In the first half of the seventeenth century, the gorgeous Baroque laces, rich in relief, combining the most varied techniques, designed with the characteristic scroll patterns of the time, were made at Venice (fig. 1). Unusual specimens of such laces are exhibited—for example, one decorated with mythological scenes—Leda with the swan, Europa, etc. The Blackborne Collection is especially rich in figured pieces; there is shown an interesting group of animals and hunting scenes of the so-called Milanese type, of the second half of the seventeenth century, which differ from the Venetian in the less plastic, more purely decorative qualities of design. These laces were used chiefly for altar furnishings. (Fig. 2 and cf. p. 92.)

The Netherlandish lace of the same period cannot easily be separated from these Italian types, but it is possible that when the laces of the Museum's new collection are carefully studied, questions of such provenance may be answered with greater assurance. Important in this respect are several examples of laces which have been identified with certain representations of lace in the Netherlandish portraits of the Rembrandt period; for instance, a lace collar that is practically identical with the one worn by William II in his portrait by Van Dyck at Amsterdam. Corresponding to the more picturesque character of the art of the Low Countries as compared with the Italian, the characteristic pattern of these Netherlandish laces is not so free and lineal as the Italian, but closely elaborated and depending rather on value contrasts of light and dark.

Introduced into France through the efforts of Colbert, the laces imitated the Venetian, at first due to the Venetian workmen who had been imported (about 1670). The presence of these workmen

makes it difficult to distinguish between these early French laces and the Venetian. This is a difficulty which also confronts us in woven fabrics; the brocades made at Lyons were at first exactly imitative of Venetian damasks. Splendid examples of lace of this period of transition are also found.

To the rich Venetian style, succeeded one truly French, reflecting in its exquisite refinement of design and technique the temper of the new age. The beautiful patterns of these laces are worked on a ground of delicate net lace. No longer, as in the seventeenth century, was the lace only an addition to parts of the clothing; it enveloped the whole figure now, as in a thin mist.

A rich variety of laces in the different styles of the eighteenth century is contained in the Blackborne Collection, from the luxurious bouquets and ornate designs of the baldachino curtains of the Louis XIV period to the neat and small all-over flowers of the Louis XV and the straight lines interspersed with flowers and gardening utensils of the Louis XVI period.

Parallel development took place in the types of Flemish lace, namely, Brussels, Malines, Valenciennes. A beautiful piece of Brussels lace with peacock design should be noted.

It is impossible to notice here all of the types of laces of the countries influenced by France and Italy that are shown in the Blackborne Collection. It may be said, however, that filet-work of the sixteenth century, Spanish blonde and English laces of the nineteenth century are well represented.

The Museum's increased lace collection now contains nearly 3,000 pieces, more than half of which date before 1800. The following countries are represented: In Europe—Italy, France, Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Dalmatia, Russia, Spain, Greece, Norway, and Sweden, Denmark and England. In Asia and Africa: Asia Minor, Turkey, Egypt, Madagascar, and St. Helena.

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