

## MILANESE BOBBIN LACE WITH HUNTING SCENES BY P. G. TRENDSELL

**I**TALY shares with the Low Countries the distinction for the earliest eminence in lace-making. The craft did not flourish in France until a later date under Louis XIV, who acted upon the advice of his minister Colbert, and Italian needlepoint lace was copied, primarily under the tuition of workers brought from that country. While it may in general terms be claimed that the palm for needlepoint lace belongs to Italy, and for bobbin lace to the Low Countries, it must not be forgotten that fine needlepoint was produced in Flanders, and to a still greater degree fine bobbin lace in Italy. Venice was the home of needlepoint, and Milan soon took the lead in bobbin lace, a variety which she made peculiarly her own. The majority of bobbin laces have simple decorative motives of repeating floral character, but examples exist where a more ambitious scheme was worked out. We think of the coverlet in the Cinquantenaire Museum at Brussels,<sup>1</sup> in which an allegorical figure of Love is surrounded by the Archdukes Albert and Isabella, King Philip II and others, with the shields of Brabant, Spain, England, Austria and France, sacred subjects and monograms, motives taken from the Ommegang of Brussels, angelic musicians, and a vandyked border representing Roman Emperors and the Sibyls. This is believed to have been a gift from the lace-makers of Brussels to the Archdukes Albert and Isabella on the occasion of their marriage in 1599.

The Brussels coverlet will always be regarded as a classical example of the employment of bobbin lace for pictorial ends, but the narrative purpose is too conspicuous. The arrangement is that of a chessboard, and the full-length figures in the wide border give a restless effect. The decorative parts are mere shapeless curves, and the whole piece is rather a *tour de force* than a work of art. A very different result is attained in the larger of the two bobbin-lace panels which have been lately given to the Victoria and Albert Museum by Mr. Louis Clarke [PLATE I]. Here we see that Italian genius has given a real decorative value to the subject. Cupid with bow and arrow, huntsmen holding spears, hounds in leash, stags, lions and dogs are there, but blended into the bold and symmetrical floral pattern, so as to form part of it and to make an agreeable relief to the foliage. Naturalism is here carried far enough, but not too far. If it were a tapestry or

painting we should expect to see both men and animals in a wooded landscape with all the natural features represented. This would be too elaborate a scheme for lace-workers to reproduce, and the graceful well-balanced scrolls adapt themselves more to the convention of their craft and make a sufficient and admirable setting. This panel is a fine example of the earlier kind of North Italian bobbin lace, which was joined by bars or *brides* of twisted threads, or was so designed that even these slight connections were unnecessary.

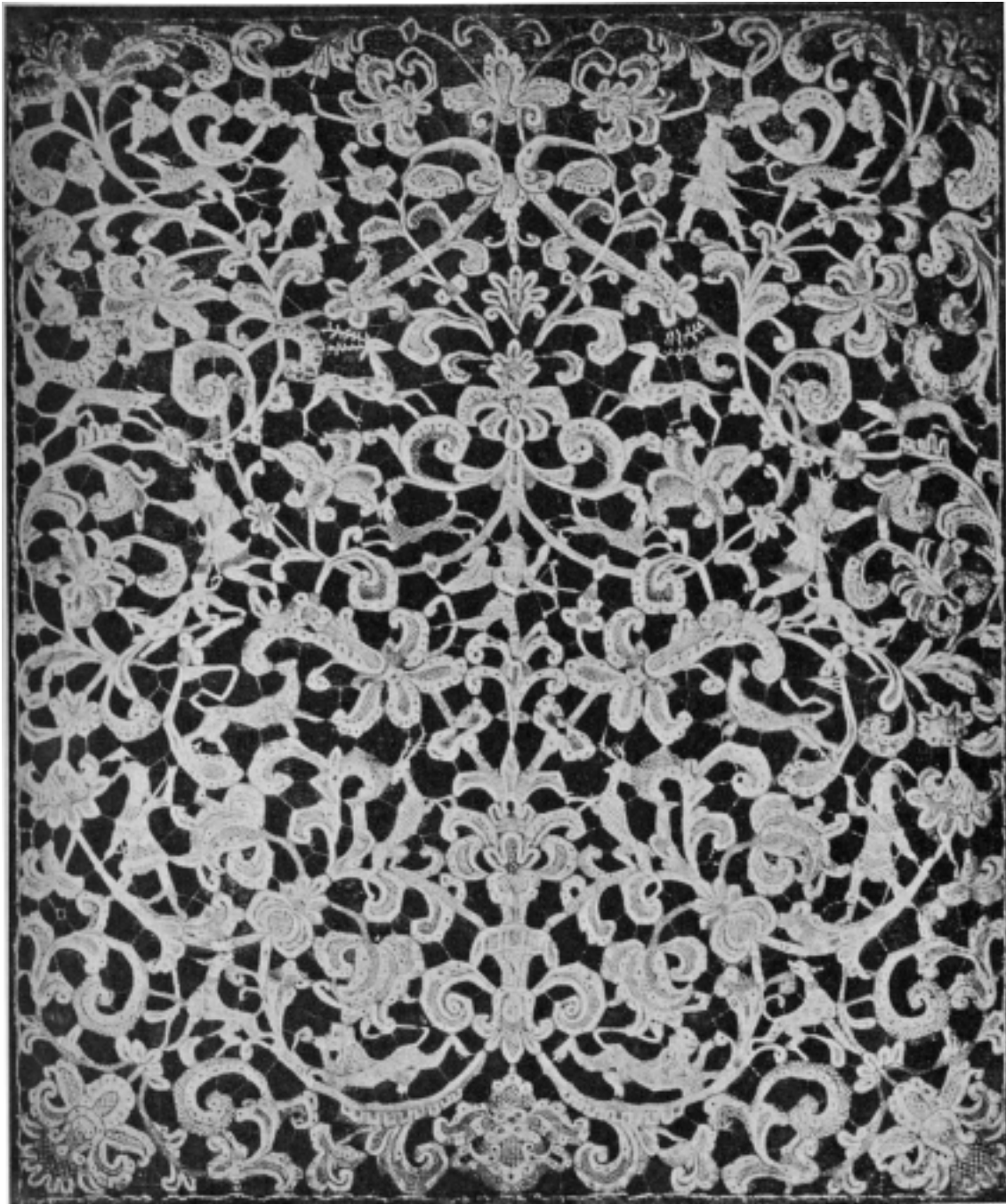
The smaller panel forming part of Mr. Clarke's gift [PLATE II, B] shows the later development of this lace towards the end of the 17th century. Huntsmen with hounds are here introduced less conspicuously into the design, and in addition a double-headed eagle appears at the bottom of the panel.

Signora Ricci illustrates a similar panel, which has representations of sirens as well as eagles amongst the curving stems.<sup>2</sup> It belongs to the Milanese group, but the authoress suggests that it may have been actually made at Vienna. It does not, however, seem necessary to seek for an heraldic significance whenever we find a double-headed eagle used as a decorative motive. It is true that there occur such examples as the important Flemish cover of 17th century bobbin lace in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, which is said to have belonged to King Philip IV of Spain (1605-1665), and in which crowned eagles appear, as well as the collar of the Order of the Golden Fleece. The eagles on that specimen and the sirens on Signora Ricci's panel remind us that both are common motives upon the richly coloured embroideries from Crete of the 17th and 18th centuries. This may be accounted for by the influence of Italian art in the Greek Islands during the centuries following the fall of Constantinople.

The thickly plaited ground of diamond-shaped mesh shown in PLATE II is a feature introduced in the later part of the 17th century, and very commonly seen from that time on Italian and Flemish laces. The technique, however, varies; in Italy the patterns were made separately and the mesh was worked round afterwards, whilst in Flanders the lace was usually worked in one piece. These two fine panels of lace form a handsome addition to the Museum collection.

<sup>1</sup> E. Van Overloop, *Une Dentelle de Bruxelles de 1599*.

<sup>2</sup> Elisa Ricci, *Antiche Trine Italiane. Trine a Fusilli*. Milano. Fig. 9.

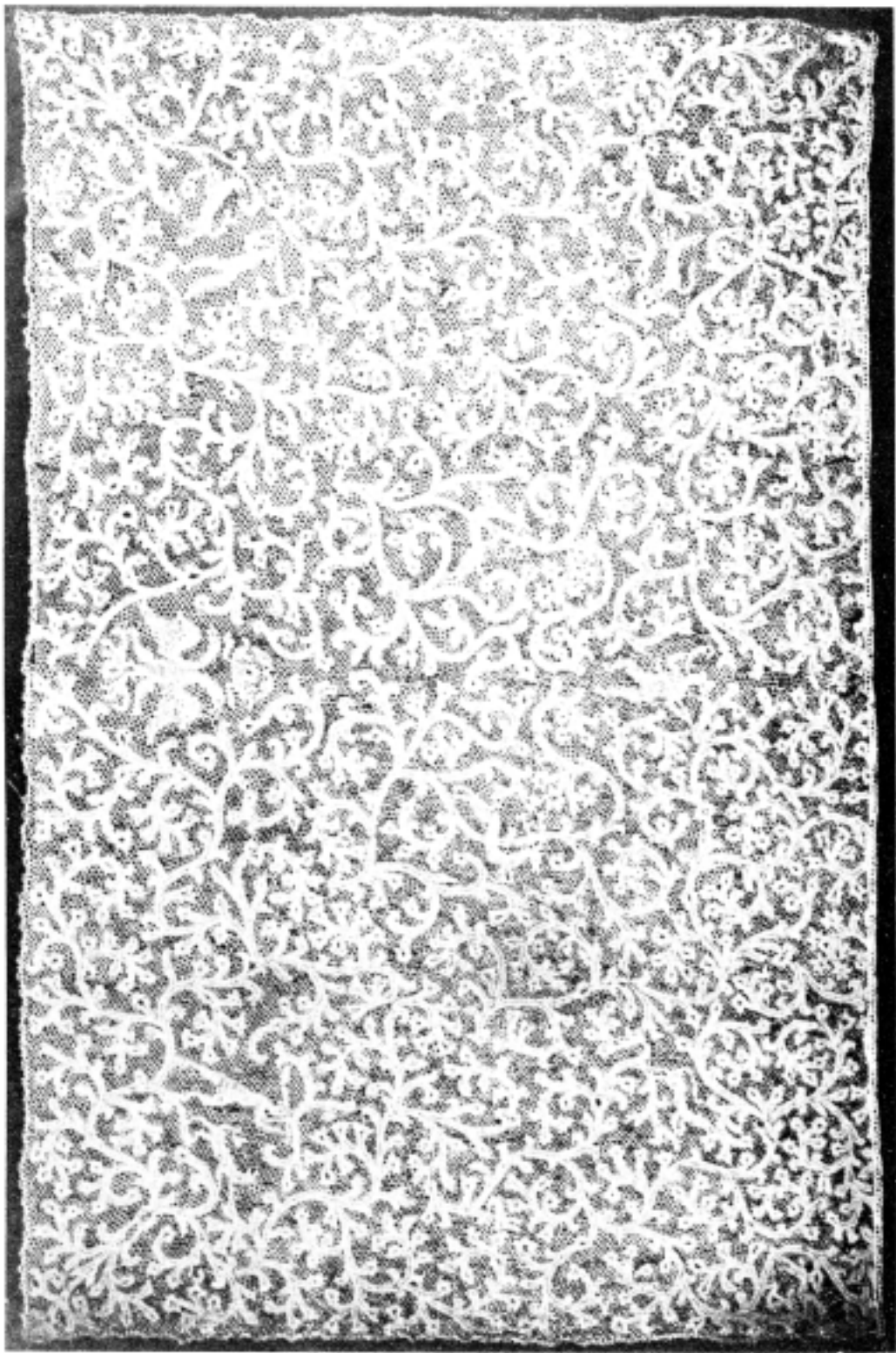


FIRST HALF OF 17TH CENTURY ; 3' 2" x 2' 7½"

GIFT OF MR. LOUIS CLARKE TO THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM

MILANESE BOBBIN LACE WITH HUNTING SCENES  
PLATE I

GIFT OF MR. LOUIS CLARKE TO THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM



MILANSE HOBIN LACE WITH HUNTING SCENES  
PLATE II