

Embroidery and lace

Autor(en): **Stein, P.**

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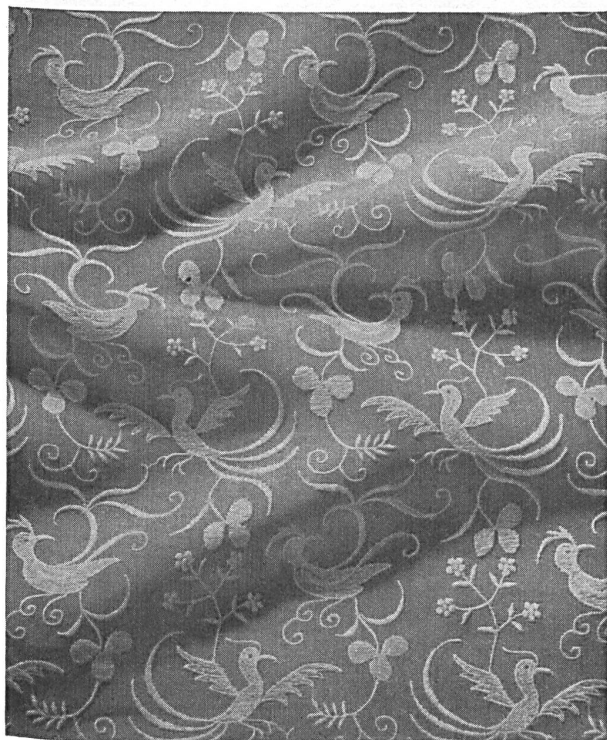
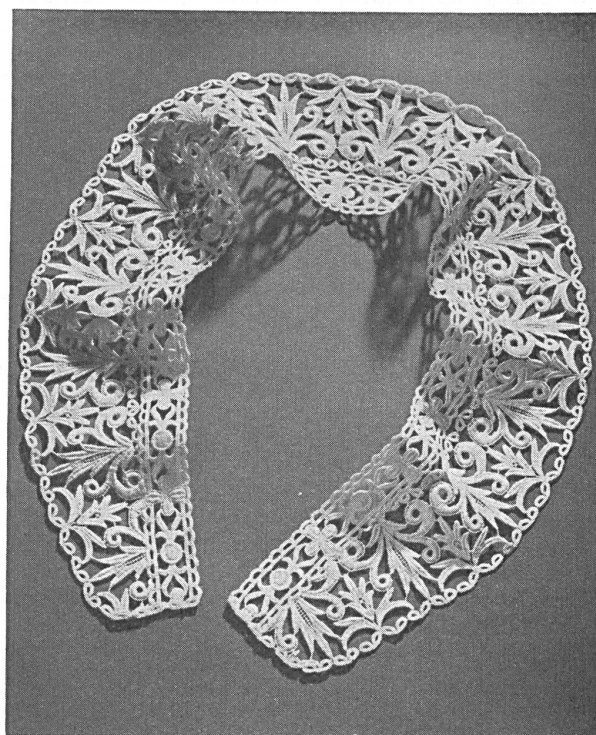


EMBROIDERY AND LACE

by Dr. P. STEIN, Director of the Swiss Embroidery Exporters Association, St. Gall

Embroidery and lace have been a delight to the feminine world since very ancient times, and there is no sign of any change in this respect. These dainty decorative touches are not just a mere passing craze, they answer a need whose origin is not new but almost as old as humanity itself — the need, born of the aesthetic sense, to imagine and create forms and objects. This sense does not find expression only in the arts, architecture, the style of furniture and the setting out of gardens but also, since the beginning of time, in clothes.

Even in the earliest days, man sought to satisfy his love of beauty by the use of colours and the art of weaving. This was continually improved until the highest point was reached with the production of lace. Lace was produced with great enthusiasm in France, Italy and Belgium from the 14th to the 19th centuries, and the designs and technique still arouse our admiration even to-day in this materialistic period — undeniable proof that in spite of the ascen-



dancy of the machine the aesthetic sense has not completely disappeared.

When governments try nowadays to hinder the import of embroidery and lace by styling them as luxury products, they are forgetting that there is a continual search, even in the technical field, for beauty of forms. Fortunately it has not yet occurred to any government official to prohibit the importation of a motor-car simply because its shape is more elegant than that of a popular model. Perhaps one day it will at last be realised that man does not live by bread alone and that it is not up to governments to lay down to the consumer which of his particular needs he may or may not satisfy.

The St. Gall embroidery industry was born and developed during a period when there was still no discrimination between so-called essential and non-essential goods. Its origin is found in the idea of making relief effects by embroidering fabrics rather than in applying the technique of lace-making. The foundation chosen was very fine muslin. The success was startling and by the end of the 18th century this branch was

providing employment for 40,000 embroideresses. The first embroidering machine was invented in 1829, but it took more than 20 years to perfect it enough for its products to satisfy the consumer. Invention followed upon invention. In 1865, the first pantograph was made, and in 1910 the automatic shuttle machine made its first appearance on the market. It is interesting to note that these three types of machine are still used to-day, for each of them possesses its own particular advantages.

In 1913 the embroidery industry was at the head of Swiss exports with a total export value of 210 million francs (gold). The set-backs suffered by this industry after the first World War — consequences of the supplanting of cotton lingerie by rayon and tricot, of devaluations and import restrictions — were gradually able to be neutralised. This recovery was interrupted by World War II. But manufacturers did not allow themselves to be discouraged; they worked to improve

the quality of their products and to perfect new techniques. After the war, St. Gall was able to offer embroidery and embroidered laces which, by reason of their originality, conquered not only Parisian Haute Couture but also very large sections of the population. Since manufacturers have realised that the Swiss embroidery industry can only hold its own by work of the best quality, they devote particular care and attention to the training of designers, enlargers, hand-embroiderers and workers in the home. But the use of new materials and their combinations in appliqué work are also studied. New designs take into account the evolution of fashions and taste. Thus for example geometric figures have been most popular recently.

These continual efforts show that in spite of the new wave of rearmament, embroidery and lace are nevertheless still very much in demand, so much so that at the moment it is no longer possible, even by working overtime, fully to meet the demand.



THE TEXTILE FINISHING INDUSTRY

by Dr. P. KÜNG, Secretary of the Association of the Swiss Textile Finishing Industry, Zurich

«Every living thing has a tendency towards colour». These words of Goethe's are particularly appropriate in the field of fashion, and therefore in the field of textiles too. Man's instinctive need to adorn himself and his taste for colour continually encourage him to change the shape and colour of the objects around him, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the field of textiles.

A textile industry therefore, even in its very earliest stages, is not capable of enduring without a corresponding finishing industry; this is particularly true in Switzerland, a country with a very old textile tradition.

It would not be possible therefore to ignore the economic role of the Swiss textile finishing industry. Some idea of its importance may be gained from the fact that it employs about 10,000 people in some 80 different establishments. Among these there are firms of varying degrees of importance from the small workshop, which is still purely artisanal in character and where the work is mainly carried out by hand, to the large completely industrialised concern with more than 1,000 employees. This industry is mainly situated in the cantons of the north and the east of Switzerland where the textile industry is mostly to be found (Aargau, Appenzell, Basle, Glaris, St. Gall, Thurgau and Zurich).

The textile finishing industry, which is very highly developed in Switzerland and quite capable of carrying out all its many tasks, handles the materials entrusted to it at all stages in their manufacture. However it is only very rarely that it deals with textile fibres that have not yet been spun. For colour weaving on the other hand it bleaches, dyes, mercerises and in certain cases also prints the yarns. The fabrics — the next

