

Old Embroideries.

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Illustrated by photographs from specimens in the famous South Kensington Museum, London, England.

PART I.

It will, I think, be readily admitted that the title, "old embroideries," is sufficiently comprehensive to apply to a general review of the ornamental and decorative needlework that has ever been made by mankind. Needless to say that it is out of the question in two or three short articles to convey anything like an adequate impression of each one of the almost numberless stages in that sustained and prolonged course of human activity which has been engaged in embroidery throughout the six or seven thousand years concerning which various historic documents exist; I can only endeavor to give a few suggestive indications of embroidery generally, its aims and some few of its types.

Amongst the records of Chaldeans, Egyptians, Chinese, Assyrians, Hebrews, Greeks, and Persians of pre-Christian times we find traces of workmen and workwomen—artificers skilled in cunning needleworks, such as Bezaleel, who did so much to adorn the Temple, makers of embroidered dresses which were condemned by Ezekiel, and Babylonians whose work, prized by Joshua, was the staple of a large trade carried on by merchants of Tyre. Homer sings of Sidonian embroideresses, of Circe, of Penelope, of Helen and Andromache, whose occupation in needlework as pictured by him was doubtless a common one amongst women of his date. The Grecian *gynæcea* or women's rooms appeared to have teemed with industrious needlewomen, sempstresses, and embroideresses. From the times of the Roman Emperors onward throughout those of the Byzantine dynasties as well as those of the Saracenic invasion and of the development of European nations as we practically know them now, specimens of embroideries abound in quantities; and collections, private and public, afford us the principal means of becoming acquainted with the range of the world's art of these relatively later periods.

Now the prime intention of embroidery is evidently to please the eye with some expression of form and color. And the birth of this intention seems to be coeval almost with that of sewing and stitching for useful purposes only. Embroidery is certainly nothing more than the artistic adaptation of plain needlework to the production of pleasing effects. How various stitches are taken is frequently explained and demonstrated in the pages of this magazine by others more competent than myself. I think therefore that I need not venture to enlarge much upon this side of technical practice. To do so in any efficient way would necessitate a considerable number of illustrations upon a scale large enough to exhibit stitches in detail. In the necessary absence now of such illustrations I shall confine any remarks upon stitches that I may have to make to the narrowest compass.

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