SPANISH STITCHES

By Mary Louise Foster

IN THE long, slow evolution of civilization, the record written on vellum, or printed on paper, gives us only facts, or points-of-view, of comparatively recent date. Before either of these forms existed, man painted in outline the crude pictures of animals on the walls of his cave, wonderfully vivid in their simple lines, yet revealing to us the kind of animal whose habitat was in that region. These records are found in the caves of Altamira in Spain, and in the southern part of France. They fill us with admiration for that primitive man, who had so great an interest in the animal life about him that he strove to reproduce it. Then, there are the stories chiselled upon the pyramids and obelisks in Egypt. They tell us of their emperors, their dynasties, and their wars. Very interesting and illuminating concerning certain events of importance to the country, perhaps, but omitting records of the social conditions, of the influence of new racial contacts, and of the industrial life of the community. For such facts we must turn to other forms of record, quite as enduring as the chiselled stone or the written word. The embroidered cloth, the woven rug, the delicate lace tell their story vividly and truly of that remote past. They are the silent witnesses of the subtle influence of race upon race, of nation upon nation, of international relations, and of the fine imaginative quality, which necessity develops.

These evidences of the daily life of men and women of the long, long ago tell a fascinating story. From the stone arrowheads, which from time to time we dig up in the woods and fields about us, we can picture to ourselves how the Red Man hunted before our advent. And so, likewise, from scraps of linen and cotton and pottery, which have been preserved by chance in marriage-chests, in tombs, or temples, we can learn something about the domestic arts and crafts. By fitting together these scraps, as one fits in the bits of a jigsaw puzzle, one gets finally a restoration of the work, centuries old, worn, and perhaps dirty, but, nevertheless, a true example of an ancient craft. And, if one compares a similarly restored piece from some other country, one may perhaps be able to reconstruct evidence of international communication, otherwise obscure.

A personal experience will illustrate my meaning. I was sitting by chance at a luncheon next to a medical missionary, who had returned to this country after many years of service in India. I was wearing a lace scarf recently made in Granada after a pattern inherited from the time when the Moors had their splendid capital in that place. The design showed clearly on the blue background of my dress. She looked closely at the scarf, asked me where I got it and then said: "I have the duplicate of it. I will show it to you later. Mine was made for a wedding gift for me by the young girls in the village in India where I lived for years." And later she showed me her scarf. The net, the design, the needlework, all were the same! How came it to pass that the same pattern was in use in regions so far removed? It seems clear that the Arabs, when they came to Spain, brought with them the art of lace making, which they themselves had received from India and Persia.

A rich civilization was brought to Spain by the Moors. By irrigation they converted the arid waste of Estremadura, a province in western Spain, into highly productive flax fields. The spinning and weaving of the flax became a domestic industry, yielding not only enough linen of all grades for home consumption, but enough also for export. Today very few hand looms are still in use. The workers are old and feeble and not long for this world. With their death will cease this time-honored craft. Wheat is now the chief agricultural product of Estremadura, but for the most part the whole territory is given over to the huge flocks of sheep which find winter pasturage there.

Native costumes of Lagartera

A similar story can be told of Andalusia, that was the very centre of Moorish dominion. Under their initiative the silkworm culture was very extensive, and unsurpassed silk and velvet were made. These stuffs were eagerly sought by royalty and nobility for their own splendid garments and for the rich caparisoning of their horses. Cotton, also, known today by the Arabic word, "algodón," was extensively cultivated and woven into cloth. Now, none of these industries exists. Only the embroidered treasures of State and Church reveal the excellence of that handiwork and the beauty and decorative quality of the needlework.

The Arabs, although they appropriated freely from their Persian and Byzantine predecessors, did, however, possess their own individual characteristics, which developed rapidly under the favorable opportunities in Spain. Their special type of decoration was the rich combination of lines consisting of geometrical figures interlaced and spreading over the surface. It produced a highly decorative effect. The Moorish women, during the long hours of their harem life, made use of the same designs for their needlework. And the Spanish girl carried on both the art and the craft, for she was taught that she was ready to marry when she knew her catechism and her stitches. "Writers of histories make mention that, in old time, there was wont in Spain, great wagers to be laid, who would spin or weave most, and times were appointed to bring forth their work to shew it and give judgment of it. And great honor and praise was given unto them that labored most diligently." * While probably these contests no longer exist, it is true that in the villages off the main-traveled road, much time is spent on embroidery. The rolls of homespun are being taken out of the family chests and the old designs copied. The finished table scarf or cushion cover is then brought to Madrid or other large town or city by women dressed in the native costume, who give an accent of picturesqueness to the transaction. In these embroideries black, a favorite color with the Arabs, is the prevailing color. Red and blue are occasionally combined, as well as blue and raw sienna.

Figure 1 illustrates a sampler and shows what stitches the Spanish girl was taught. It is very old

* Vives' Instruction of a Woman, Court of Queen Catherine. "Vives and the Renascence Education of Women," Foster Watson, N. Y., 1912.

Figure 1 — Spanish Sampler

Figure 2 — Camels Hair Rug

Figure 4 — "Laid" Stitch

and worn and faded, but still shows vividly the type of stitch and of decoration in use. The former is what is called "laid" work, such that the same design appears on the reverse side of the cloth. A slight variation, and one gets what looks like a loop, but which is not actually. It recalls the Chinese type of embroidery. The colors in the sampler are red and blue with a very little green in some of the forms; the thread is fine; hence the lacy effect of the decoration.

Even in rugs the black and white effect is sought after. Figure 2 illustrates a modern camel's-hair rug. A form of popular decoration, copied from architectural motifs, may be seen in the wide white band, and again as a part of the central portion. It is called "the pinnacle," and is very conspicuous on Moorish buildings. A variety in size of thread produces the wavy lines. Worked in over the black and white, one often sees brilliant colors, reproducing the oriental rug in appearance.

A further development of the "laid" stitch, universally called the "Spanish stitch," is produced by the use of a heavy worsted. Black is the color invariably used. Figures 3, 4 and 5 illustrate this stitch. The design here, too, is accurately repeated on the reverse side; in fact the upper part of the scarf (Fig. 3) has been folded over so that it shows the reverse side. The design is the same on the wrong side. Occasional knots differentiate the two sides. The introduction of the strange animal-form indicates Persian influence, while the shield, placed between the two animals, connects the design with some Spanish family. Perhaps the family was in fact a "mozarabe" family, i.e. a Christian family living under the dominion of the Moors but preserving its own laws and customs. A similar treatment appears in Figure 4.

In Figures 5 and 6 we have the introduction of flower forms. These no more than the animal forms have resemblance to any product on sea or land, but reveal the exuberance of the Moorish imagination. The design, in greater simplicity, came from Persian and Byzantine sources. Figure 6 was originally a sleeve made for the fiesta frock of a girl of Toledo. It had a cuff heavily embroidered in black.

Drawn work, known as "deshilado," is used on linen. An illustration of this type is shown on the edge of the sampler, Figure 1. Appliqué was another style used especially on the altar frontals, of

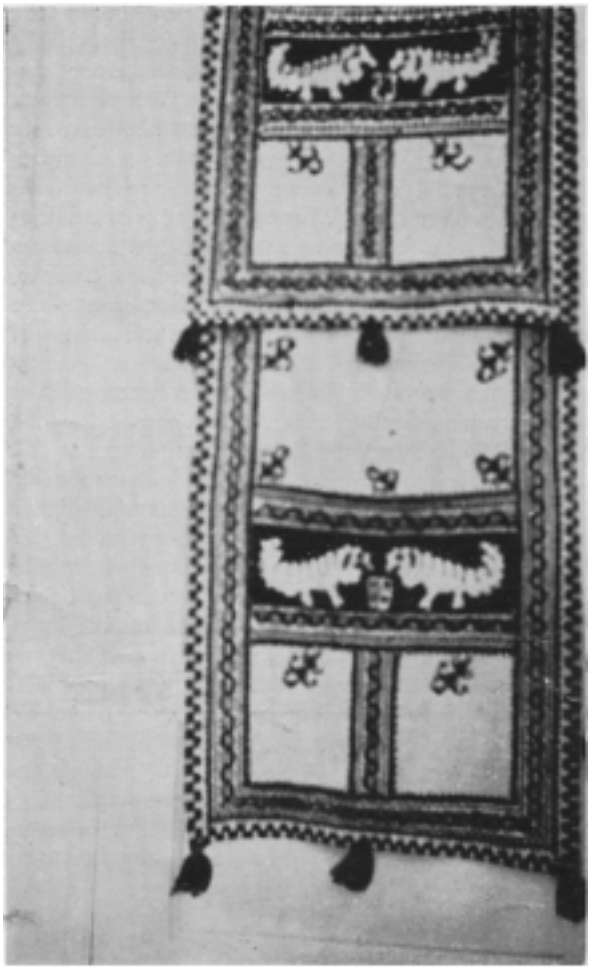

Figure 3 — "Laid" Stitch

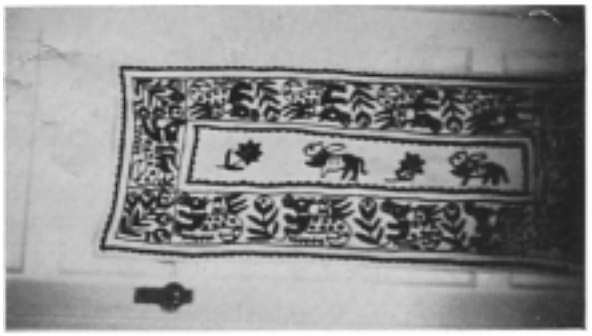

Figure 5 — "Laid" Stitch

Figure 6 — Flower Forms

which there is a magnificent collection in the monastery of Guadalupe.

Queen Isabella, much as she hated the Moors and whose banishment from Spain she accomplished, had the same love of embroidery as her foes. Her recreation from the hardships of camp and heavy governmental duties was embroidery, enriched with gold and silver thread, for the altars of the cathedrals. But the decorative arts were not Isabella's only preoccupation. She made her husband's shirts, of which we have lists telling that they were worked in the "Spanish stitch" in black and gold, or even in black alone.

The daughters of Isabella were accomplished needlewomen. Catherine of Aragon introduced the "Spanish stitch" to the English Court, and in the difficult years with Henry VIII found solace for her lonely hours in embroidery. Mary was taught this needlecraft, and during her reign she preserved the traditions of her mother and grandmother. In the Victoria and Albert Museum is a jacket-tunic said to have belonged to Queen Elizabeth. It is of linen worked entirely with black silk with the characteristic floral designs of the period.

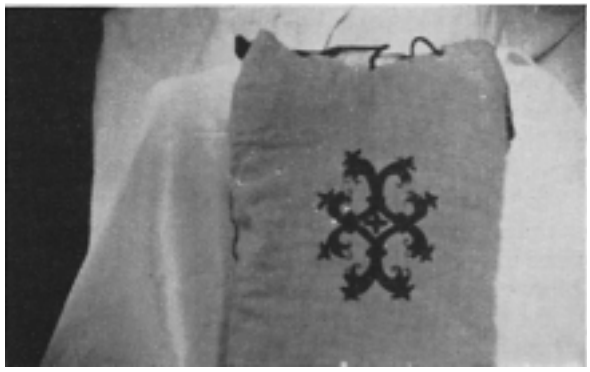

Figure 8

Within recent years lovers of these passing arts and crafts have established the Museo de Artes Industriales in Madrid where they are rescuing these works from destruction. The copying of the motifs is encouraged. One of the recently revived designs is shown in Figure 8, the double-headed eagle of Charles V. And so this ancient art of needlework is being preserved in various ways.

Harness Tapestry

(Continued from page 13)

5	6	Orange	5	4	Green
1	6	Orange	1	4	Green
6	6	Orange	5	4	Green
2	6	Orange			
			2	6	Orange
5	6	Green	6	6	Orange
1	6	Green	2	6	Orange

ILLUSTRATION No. 2

No. of Treadle	*Picks Pattern*	*Weft*	*Binder*	*No. of Treadle*	*Picks Pattern*	*Weft*	*Binder*
5	6		Bitter-sweet	2	6		Electric blue
1	6		Bitter-sweet	6	6		Electric blue
5	6		Bitter-sweet	2	6		Electric blue

Repeat in the same order, ending with the bittersweet.

Let's Design Some New Patterns

(Continued from page 19)

"rose" fashion, except the last, which was woven "star" fashion. These results are shown in Figure 2.

Again the cloth was cut from the loom and, using a new warp, I drew in an enlarged version of the last experiment, which is shown in Figure 3.

In Figure 4 we have a similar design, except that now the bold diagonal line of blocks of the figure in the center of the cloth has been further enlarged, so that now there are six blocks in line, and the center also has been changed. Yet I was not satisfied, because the four small diamonds in the central position were not connected on all sides as I wished them to be. However this same design woven "star" fashion, as shown in the lower part of Figure 4, is more pleasing than when woven "rose" fashion.

Figure 5 shows the design still further enlarged. With seven blocks on the outer diagonal, the design has now grown smaller wings inside the large wings. They also resemble "eyes" on the wings of the wild silk moths. The four diamonds in the center are now connected on all four sides. We now have a pattern suitable for coverlets, but probably for little else unless woven in fine silks. If you turn the page around so that you look at the picture from the corner, the design seems to be entirely different, a somewhat elaborated maltese cross.

Figure 6 shows another alteration of this family of designs, and this is woven "star" fashion. Here the double diamond design between the larger central figures has been reduced and reversed. Also, a small block or "table" figure has been inserted between the two parts of the design. We now have a large composite figure, made up of three distinct elements, or three smaller patterns. Many of the old Colonial drafts were composite designs, and I believe that it was in this way that many of the old weavers composed their own patterns.

For many people, these old Colonial drafts will never cease to be fascinating; but with all our improvements on the heavy, clumsy looms of Colonial