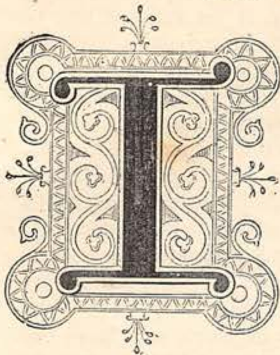
# ART EMBROIDERY AS AN EMPLOYMENT FOR LADIES.

BY A LADY.



CANNOT do better, I think, than begin my remarks on art embroidery with a quotation from a wise old author, which it would be well if all women would lay to heart:—"To learn an art which thou knowest not, four things are needful. The first and most needful of all is a great desire, and diligence, and constant endeavour to learn the art; the second is a copy or example by which thou mayest learn; the third is to give earnest heed to the master, and watch how he worketh, and to be obedient to him in all things; the fourth is to put thine own hand to the work, and practise it with all industry. Where one of these four is wanting, the art will never be learned or mastered." And to the advice of the "Theologia Germanica" I will add just one more little maxim: Have quiet, regular hours for daily application.

The term "art embroidery" has come to be the generic term for all the various revivals of the Kensington School of Art Needlework, in crewels and silk embroidery. For myself, I consider crewels the proper foundation of all, and so shall begin my article with them, afterwards proceeding to the higher branches of silk, and other costly needlework. We find in almost every Continental language the word "crewel," as signifying in olden days a two-threaded yarn or worsted; and as in the year 1561 an Embroiderers' Company was incorporated in England, with proper armorial bearings, we may safely conclude that at about that period the art was at its zenith, not only in England, but also on the Continent, where the English ladies were very highly celebrated for their skill in "gold embroidery, and krewels." The stitch of crewel-work was known in the thirteenth century as *opus plumarium*, or feather-stitch, from the arrangement of its threads, which, from being worked lengthwise, in long lengths close together, give an appearance of overlapping each other, and suggest a likeness between them and the plumage of a bird's wing. This is the principal stitch used in crewel embroidery, but it is now more generally known, I believe, as tapestry or feather-stitch. Several others are also used, viz., very fine chain-stitch—by some people believed to be the true tapestry stitch, which was much in vogue in England in the seventeenth century. Judging from some specimens which I possess, it seems to have been worked round and round, until the design was filled up completely. This is also known as "tambour stitch," and the Japanese work which we see for sale is worked in it. The exquisite shading and fineness of the old English work in this stitch places it, however, quite on a pinnacle by itself, and I feel sure it will not be much imitated. Outline stitch, *point feston*, French knots, and long-stitch, called *point au passé*, are some of the others.

There is no doubt, alas! that, at the present day, we cannot produce any work in crewels to equal that done by our ancestors; the same fine, good yarn is not made, nor is there any encouragement to manufacture it in the rage for cheap productions; and my idea on looking at curtains of several centuries old, in use at the present day, is that the dames who did the embroidery also wove the good but coarse linen on which it is done, and perhaps too had something to do with the wools.

The materials at present used for this embroidery are crash—a species of towelling, durable and strong—hemp, coarse sheeting, French flax, linen twill, Java canvas, hop-sacking, and unbleached linens. Workhouse sheeting has been much in fashion, both for dresses and furniture; but for curtains I do not recommend it, as it catches the dust so soon, and becomes soiled. Hop-sacking is very charming for polonaises, and can be obtained, like the Java canvas, of a good width and in pretty colours—white, buff, *eau de Nil*, sage-green, browns, and greys.

For woollen materials "Sammal"—a stuff well known in ecclesiastical embroidery—and serges are much used; also diagonal cloths, and a new material called "cloth of gold." Upon this latter, which is manufactured from refuse silk, I have lately seen an exquisite pair of curtains, designed by the Princess Louise, for Lady Rendlesham. The design represented a large pot of white lilies on each curtain, in natural colours, upon the cloth of gold, with a dado of dead-leaf-coloured plush. The effect was excellent.

Crewels are not dyed in a great many shades, and true artists do not utilise the bright hues derived from aniline dyes; they are too bright for nature; they fade quickly, and are so gaudy as to take away that element of permanent repose at which we should aim, above all things, in the decoration of our homes. There are seldom more than four shades to each colour, with the exception of the greens; and the continual use of one shade serves to give a certain unity to the design. The wools are sold either by the single skein or by the pound; but if you intend to engage in a work of any size, the cheapest plan to adopt is to buy by the pound in assorted colours. The gas, and blue greens are not in good taste in crewel work; and brown, yellow, and olive greens are used instead. I advise the choice of blues procured from indigo, and not those obtained from Prussian blue. Sky-blues are preferable to cobalt, and ultramarine shades, for the lighter blues. Yellows are of the gamboge shades, and reds should never merge into scarlets. One of the aims of modern crewel work is to imitate the ancient; and a reference to an old piece of embroidery will speedily show a worker the reason of the content, or dismay, exhibited

by an artistic mind on viewing the subdued or gaudy colouring of a pattern submitted for examination.

On the subject of design I do not intend to enter at present; it will be better to consider it in the next part, where I shall also speak of the various stitches, and describe their application to the natural objects they are intended to represent. A clever worker uses her needle much as an artist does his brush; and I am often astonished at the wonderful effect produced by a few inspired touches with the needle and thread.

A recent well-known writer lays much stress on the care of the hands, and considers their state and condition of primary importance. "Every one must have smooth and well-dried hands to produce smooth and even work. The use of pumice-stone, with soap, by day, and rose-water and glycerine at night, to take off every particle of loose skin on which the silks may catch, is recommended, as well as the entire abolition of rings and bracelets. A large white muslin apron, with a bib attached to it, and long muslin sleeves, should always be worn while working, and if tastefully made are a really charming addition to the toilette. Very dark dresses, with any tendency in the dye to come off, are better avoided. If the work be designed for sale, extreme care in these little details is needed, or you may lose your trouble and time; for everything that destroys the gloss of the silks, or the hues of the crewels, reduces the value. Many people have a custom of touching the hair or the face when anxiously employed; this should be guarded against, as the moisture from either gives your work a dull and soiled appearance."

The implements for embroidery are few and inexpensive. A pair of small, sharp, plain scissors, tight-fitting at the points, so as to cut off ends quickly, and without catching; a very smooth thimble—one of the Continental "Nuns' thimbles" is best; they are made of black ebony, and are of endless wear: these and a steel piercer are the only things absolutely needed, besides embroidery needles. The steel piercer is a well-known instrument, round and pointed at one end, which is used like a stiletto, and wide and flat at the other end, which is rounded at the edges. It is of great use in bullion embroidery, and in floss-silk it is in constant requisition, to keep the silk smooth and open.

In the selection of a needle it is necessary to be most careful, as one too fine for the material makes the work more tedious, and ruins any silk you may work upon. The eye of your needle should be large enough to enable you to thread it quickly, without catching, or dividing any part of the silk or wool; and a needle when in use should never require several jerks or pulls to bring it through the material. As soon as the wool or silk becomes worn from use in the needle, it should be discarded, as it will produce rough work; and too great economy in this way will prove disastrous to the beauty of your undertaking.

I am so often called upon to answer the question respecting the use of "frames, or no frames," to work upon, that I was nearly forgetting what a necessary part of my subject it is for comment. A good and skilful worker can dispense with a frame with impunity; but where there is the least fear of the work being "dragged," I should never discard a frame, however cumbersome I might find it. Indeed, I think that for very large pieces of work it is well-nigh indispensable. But on this point my opinion goes contrary to that of many of the best workers in England.

The frames generally used are the square, four-sided, sliding tambour frames. They should always be several inches wider than the work to be used in them. A new frame has been recently introduced, with fine brass pins at the ends, instead of webbing; and where there is a great deal of selvage they may answer, but I hear that good workers consider the old plan of sewing the work to the webbing better for most purposes, as it allows of more complete stretching. If the work will not go into the frame all at once, you should roll it tightly in linen to prevent its getting soiled; and when you have finished stretching the material, you may proceed to trace-in your design. The two methods of tracing are by pouncing and by the use of tracing-paper. The latter is the easiest to accomplish, but unless great care be taken it may lead to much disappointment, as the black of the carbonised paper, if too new, will come off, and soil everything with which it comes in contact. Before using it should be rubbed plentifully with bread, and the effect should be tried on a spare piece of linen at first. The method of proceeding is to have a fac-simile of the design taken on oiled tracing-paper, and between this and the material place the carbonised paper, carefully pinning them in position together. Then follow the design on the tracing-paper with a knitting-needle-point, or a hard lead-pencil, and take an occasional peep to see how it progresses underneath.

To pounce a design, the outline must be carefully traced on cartridge-paper, and then pricked through, like a dressmaker's pattern, with a large No. 5 needle, or big pin, to make a clear hole. It is a good plan to prick into several folds of flannel, but do not try to prick it on a hard surface, as the holes will be too small to be of use. Then pin your pricked-paper exactly on the spot required on your material, and powder it well. The pounce-powder is made of common pipe-clay, rubbed fine; coloured, if desired, with charcoal or red chalk; and a stump, such as is used for chalk-drawing, is to be procured at any stationer's. In fact, a piece of flannel twisted tightly round a pencil or pen-handle will answer as well as anything. Rub the powder well through the holes, and go over each line several times; then blow off the powder carefully from the paper design, and go over the dotted lines on the material with pen and ink, Chinese white and gum, or a coloured chalk pencil.

Silk or satin embroidery always requires a linen backing. This should be sewn first into the frame, sew the selvages to the webbing, then hem the other sides, after cutting them, by a thread; gradually stretch the linen as tightly as possible, put in the corner pins, and then lace the sides over those of the

frame. This preliminary process requires great care, as the beauty of the work depends on the material having the same sound when struck, and surface, as a drum. The silk, or satin, is then herring-boned down by a thread to the linen, and is ready for tracing.

All embroidery should have a backing laid over the wrong side of the work to secure the ends. This is done by rubbing some stiff paste on the work and the linen, and laying upon that thin tissue-paper; when dry take the work from the frame. D. DE B.

## HUNCHBACK JIM.

WHEN all things seem quite against me, and I deem my life a curse;
When, for fancied wrongs or real, thoughts of discontent I nurse;
Then I turn with softer feelings to a memory far and dim,
And again, through mist and shadow, stands before me Hunchback Jim.

Pale and ghostly, weak and ailing, never feeling free from pain,
Oh! how bitter were his sufferings, yet who heard him e'er complain?
Though his sorrows grew around him, he was meek and patient still,
Ever gentle in his troubles and resigned to Heaven's will.

I could understand his trials, for he was my friend and mate,
And we worked for years together, coming early, going late;
And he often would, whilst toiling, pause in pain to gasp for breath,
Whilst his hands grew hot and fevered, and his face as pale as death.

And when I turned round to hold him, and to cool his burning brow,
"Thank you, Jack," he'd smile and murmur, "thank you, Jack, I'm better now;"
And while he still was speaking, he would stagger fall, and faint—
Oh! what agony of suffering—yet not one word of complaint.

He went working on in sickness, when he should have been in bed,
But he had a feeble mother who looked up to him for bread,
And so on and on with patience, looking forward to the day
Which should make an end to sorrow with the broken mould of clay.

Fate condemned him to a city, far from pleasant grove and rill;
But he nursed, with mother's worship, flowers on his window-sill;
And he held each morn communion, in a language strangely sweet,
With the little birds that fluttered, picking crumbs upon the street.

He had never known the music of a wife's soft loving tone,
Nor the clasp of baby-fingers he could fondly call his own;
But the children all around us used to gladly run to him,
For they knew the loving-kindness of poor childless Hunchback Jim.

But at length there came the morning when I missed him at his place;
On the bench his tools lay listless, mourning for the wonted face;
Shadowed by a dark foreboding, drearily the daylight passed,
Till uneasy, fearing, doubting, I could go to him at last.

There he lay—his cheek grown hollow—on his narrow little bed,
And my footsteps broke the stillness with a solemn ghostly tread;
Yet he sweetly smiled upon me, and he tried to rise and speak,
But his tongue could give no utterance, and he fell back faint and weak.

Through the night the lamp burnt dimly, flick'ring with the throes of death,
And I sat and grieved, and watched him, in the dull smoke of my breath;
When his voice the silence startled: "It's a smiling land," he said,
"And she's coming! Yes, she's coming! Jack, it's Freedom—she's ahead!"

Sure, no purer life did Heaven ever summon unto rest;
Patience, faith, and sweet contentment dwelt within that gentle breast;
Soaring happy with the angels, do I love to think of him,
And I always feel the better for my thoughts of Hunchback Jim.

REGINALD BARNETT.

the tangle, and rushed into line, each man quivering as with suppressed passion, the whole 3,000 feeling as one. There they stood for a moment, eager, leaning forward as if held only by a leash. In an instant the leash was slipped, and, with redoubled yells, the regiments became a frantic mob, each man hurling himself forwards and upwards with a fury that seemed to turn each feather and hair into instruments of war. The braves were fiends; the passion was madness.

Goza seemed to comprehend that the line of danger had been reached. At all events, he flew at some two or three of the most frantic and forward, and struck their shields with his sword, making the leather chips fly into the air. Probably it was all acting; if so, it was brilliantly clever. The last scene was as singular as any. After two hours of hard sham-fighting, and when the regiments had formed for the march off, and were chanting in low monotone, about a hundred women, clad only in a very scanty girdle of beads, came running, with prying looks and bent forms, into the field. They were cruel in their aspect, and armed with short large-headed clubs. Every now and then they stooped, and aimed heavy blows, and as they did so they screamed with triumph. Their task was to kill the wounded.

It was evening before the spectacle was over, and I left late. As I passed along the lower terraces of the river-slope I was overtaken by a regiment, at the quick march, hastening to the camping fires. The men moaned and wailed as they went, and had a look of hunger in their eyes, as well as of excitement. By-and-by the fires came in view, with dark, fantastic, monstrous forms flitting about them in the smoke, great hunks of roasting flesh, and cauldrons of steaming maize-porridge. Here and there were groups of ravenous eaters, gnawing half-raw morsels of beef, and gulping down huge ladle-loads of scalding brose. The bivouac was as savage as the review. The revelry lasted far into the night; but by the morning the army had departed, leaving behind only the bones of many an ox.

## ART NEEDLEWORK FOR LADIES.

PART THE SECOND.

NO topic connected with art needlework is so difficult to deal with as that of design. People in general are absolutely ignorant of the rules regarding it. But in spite of this, I cannot remember to have heard any one decline to give their opinion, even when they were quite incapable of forming one. To the worker who is anxious to be her own designer, a knowledge of the rudiments is needful, and will prove a most interesting study. On the threshold even of her work she finds a difficulty, and asks the question, which I hear repeated so often, "How can I conventionalise natural flowers for my work?" The servile imitation of nature has been so long preached and practised, that it is only, I think, a thoroughly artistic temperament that asks the question, or feels the desire. Our walls have been hung with flowers, our floors covered with them, we have pillowed our heads on them, and sat on them, drawn and coloured so accurately, that if we were botanists we could neither mistake the genus nor even the species. We have even hung them in our windows, of such gigantic size and Brobdignag proportions that they have dwarfed everything about them. Ionic columns, immense peacocks, and Gothic architecture have indiscriminately graced our muslin curtains; and the artistic designer, like the much-quoted "schoolmaster," has been very much "abroad." Now it is almost a certainty that I shall be asked the question, "Why are we not to have these things? surely all art is an imitation of nature?" In the interest of my art embroideress I will try, in all humility, to explain the rules of correct design. All designs must be suitable to the material on which they are intended to be placed. This is a fundamental rule; and bearing it continually in our minds, it will help us to a clear understanding of the propriety of all art decoration. For instance, the coarse texture of crash—the material on which crewel embroidery is done—is by no means suitable for floss-silks, or gold; the latter requiring a fine design of delicate tracery, while a free sketchy style is more suitable to the thickness of crewel. Guided by this rule, we shall also see the inapplicability of the designs we have mentioned to a thin transparent texture like muslin, where they are false as regards light and shade, in addition to the absurdity of their being transparent. The rule of considering the walls, curtains, and furniture of a room as the background merely of the occupants, and by no means to be allowed to draw attention from them by obtrusive colouring or form, is also a reliable guide.

From this we shall gather that rounded forms, crude colourring, and violent contrasts are all to be avoided in our work; and that flat forms and low tones of colour, used in several shades of one colour in preference to many colours, will produce a more satisfactory effect.

In one book on this subject I find so good a definition of conventionality that I prefer to copy it entire. "It is," the writer says, "a mode of representing natural objects, differing from the reality, but allowed to stand for it;" and continues—"Conventionality is always a confession of inability, or a concession to higher claims—*e.g.*, a painter cannot represent all the leaves of a tree without infinite labour. We agree, therefore, to receive as an equivalent so many leaves grouped in such a manner as to give the idea of foliage. Thus we make allowance for his inability. Even were he able to represent all the leaves, we should not require it, as such a representation would destroy what is called 'breadth of treat-

ment,' and therefore, in consideration of this higher claim, we consent to receive a 'conventional' substitute for the closer imitation."

The idea of most people that "all art is an imitation of nature" is a very misleading one; as mere imitation, all good authorities agree, is the very lowest quality in an artist. I do not mean by this that close study of natural forms, and the power of imitation of them, is unnecessary; but that the image of material objects must exist in the mind before an artist can imitate nature or seize her spirit—thus combining both composition and invention. And so I fear that no one will prove a successful designer of conventional subjects, unless they be *first* so patient and sympathetic a student of Dame Nature, that they can recreate her on paper or canvas, as the children say, "out of their own heads." The distinguishing characteristics must be caught of each flower, as I have sometimes seen very bad selections made for decoration. The great masters of conventional decoration and design are the Chinese and Japanese. On their work, of whatever kind, you never find flowers, fruit, or birds drawn and shaded accurately after nature, and applied, as European designers do, to the purposes of decoration, so that you may, so to say, eat your dinner off "the portrait of a rose!"

Not the least interesting idea in connection with art embroidery is its extreme antiquity. In the instructions given to Moses, in the Book of Exodus, for the curtains of the Ark of the Covenant and the garments of the priests, needlework of "cunning work" is especially directed to be used as the decoration; and in Exodus xxxi. 1, we have the very names of the workers. The last-mentioned is most likely the embroiderer; and they are both mentioned as being especially inspired with the skill and wisdom needful. Throughout the sacred books we find continual notice of needlework, and it has been a very great source of pleasure to me to think that there is little doubt some of the very stitches we at present use are the same that were in fashion then. The Hebrew term used in Scripture is *Maase rokem;* the Latin equivalent of which, *Opus phrygionicum*, seems to have been the real ancient name in the West. I find from an authority on the subject, since I wrote my last article, that the Roman *Opus plumarium* was not needlework, but, as its name implies, really done in feathers. Mr. Parker remarks that "English embroidery has been well and consistently known as *Opus Anglicanum*, from its being a manufacture most skilfully and extensively pursued in our own country from a very early period of its history." The decadence of needlework in England seems to date from our first German sovereigns, when the inartistic cross-stitch of German origin was introduced, from the bondage of which, I trust, we are nearly released, to return to our own national, ancient, and purer style.

The oldest specimen of needlework at present extant is what is called the Cope of St. Leo, which is supposed to date from the eighth century, and to be of Byzantine origin. It is preserved in the Vatican at Rome, and all the facts connected with it are wrapped in great mystery, which arises from the difficulty of examining it; a permission to do so being almost impossible to obtain. I do not think any good and reliable authority has ever inspected it with a view to determine its antiquity and origin. The Sion Cope, at the South Kensington Museum, which is English work, and formed part of the vestments of the famous monastery at Isleworth, is another wonderful remnant. The Bayeux Tapestry, wrought by Queen Matilda and her ladies, to commemorate the conquest of England by her husband, William the Conqueror, is worked on cloth, with two-strand worsted or crewel, and is one yard eight inches in breadth, and more than seventy-five yards in length. The principal stitch used is chain-stitch for outlines, and the tapestry stitch for large masses of work. It seems to have been presented as a thank-offering by Queen Matilda to the Cathedral of Bayeux, in Normandy; and I remember to have read somewhere that the first Napoleon made an extraordinary use of it as a means of inflaming the French nation against England when he contemplated invading our shores, and sent it to the great cities and towns to be exhibited, to show that, as an invasion in the eleventh century had been successful, the same thing might be done with more ease with the improved means of warfare of the nineteenth.

At the close of the eighteenth century a revival of the art of needlework took place; and no record of English work would be complete without containing a mention of Miss Linwood, who, in addition to being an accomplished needlewoman, was her own artist and designer. Her works numbered sixty-four pieces, mostly copies of the old masters, such as Carlo Dolci's "Salvator Mundi," for which she was offered £3,000. The collection was exhibited in London many years ago, and I am told all specimens of her work are much prized at present. From this period date many pieces of work of a kind with which my readers are probably familiar, and may even possess, as relics of some half-forgotten ancestress—landscapes and figures on silk, satin, and velvet, embroidered with crewels and silk, and also linen curtains, some of which are singularly good in design and colours. At an old house in the country, where I pay frequent pleasant visits, they possess a wonderful specimen, which is framed as a picture, and hangs over the mantelpiece. It represents our blessed Lord's agony in the garden. The faces are executed in very good style, in pen and ink on the silk ground; but the draperies, hands and arms, and feet are worked in long and short-stitch embroidery, and show an utter ignorance of anatomy, as the arms are nearly as long as the whole body. The needlework of this picture is beautifully executed. After the reign of Elizabeth—herself an admirable needlewoman—until the end of the last century, the needle seems to have been much neglected in England as a means of decoration. I have been thus particular in noticing the historical part of my subject, because I think my worker of to-day will feel an increased interest in her pleasant employment when she thinks how famous it was in

days of yore, and that she possesses, as an Englishwoman, an hereditary right to excel in it.

The first consideration is the frame, which I have thought it best to illustrate (Fig. 1), with the linen stretched in it ready for use. It is an ordinary hand-frame; but for those who really intend to make a profession of embroidery, and to do large pieces of bullion, silk, or appliqué work, a standing frame is really the best. The care of the health is an object of primary importance, and habits of leaning and stooping should be most carefully avoided. Where it is possible one hand (the left) should be kept continually *under* the frame, and on this hand a thimble should be used. For young girls, continuous hours of work at the embroidery-frame are very bad, and may lead to all kinds of evils, of which a displacement or forcing out of the shoulder-blade is the

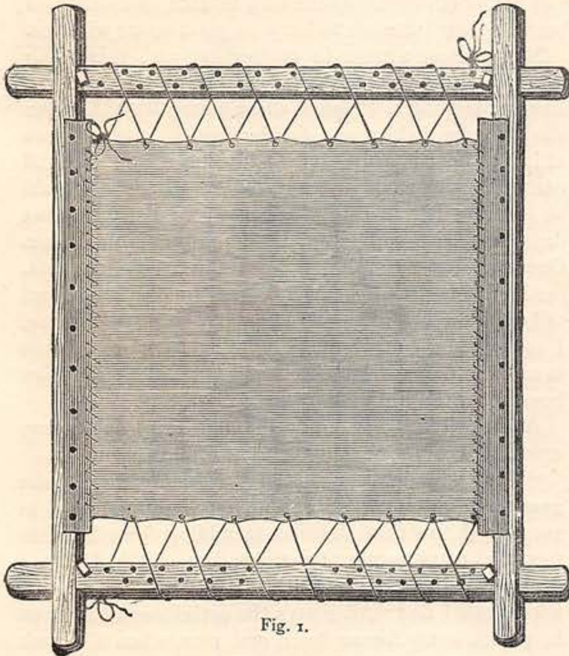


Fig. 1.

worst. To prevent stooping, too long a space for working should not be framed at once. All the materials for use in embroidery should be the best; this is particularly the case in bullion and tinsel, or poor "passing" will turn out a very poor investment, not repaying the trouble bestowed on the work.

"Passing" consists of sewing down a rich gold thread in the required pattern, with twisted or purse silk of the yellow shade to match. It is sometimes raised over whipcord, in any desired pattern, for the background of a large subject. Fig. 2 represents the "basket stitch," which is formed by laying rows of whipcord on the design, and sewing them down firmly; over this the gold cord is laid between the alternate rows, and sewn down. In doing a large design, and one which has to be used many times over, "tracing linen" is the best to use, for it lasts so much longer. At the present day many embroiderers are in the habit of working their designs directly on the silk or

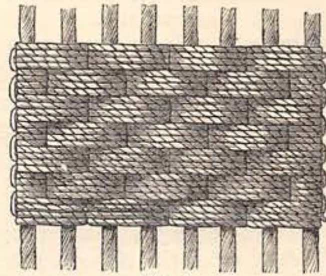


Fig. 2.

velvet. The ancient work is generally mounted—that is, embroidered first on linen, and then cut out, leaving a narrow border. It is then tacked on the velvet, or silk, and the raw edges concealed with either single or double silk twist, according to the thickness required. To receive the figures or flowers, the satin velvet or silk must be placed in a frame. This can be done best by first stretching a soft linen, and one rather open in texture, in the frame, and then tacking the velvet very accurately and smoothly upon it. If scrolls of gold, or silk twist, or flourishes have to be added, too much regularity in putting them on should be carefully avoided. If the eye of the worker be a correct one, she can generally manage to put them on without a pattern; but if not, and a guide be needed, the scrolls and flourishes should be traced on tissue-paper, which can be torn away when they are completed, as is usual in braiding patterns. The mechanical exactness of some of the modern work is not to be admired. The mediæval embroideress rather seems to have emulated the rich variety of nature, in her painstaking efforts to make none of her leaves and flowers precisely alike. In this style, too, we should work our crewels on linen, remembering that by it we can alone distinguish the thoughtful and tasteful hand-labour from the senseless production of the machine, which goes over so many repeats with ceaseless regularity. It is always pleasant to think that the higher branches of embroidery can never be imitated, at least by anything in the way of machinery with which we are now acquainted; and even if it were in a certain measure, it never would be in complete sympathy with the feeling of a true artist. In my next article on the subject I will continue the illustration of those stitches which can be imitated or explained on paper, and endeavour to afford some assistance to those who are beyond the reach of those *vivâ voce* instructions so needful to the aspirant to complete perfection in the art of embroidery.