

THE NEEDLEWORK OF TURKISH AND BULGARIAN GIRLS.

By DORA DE BLAQUIERE.

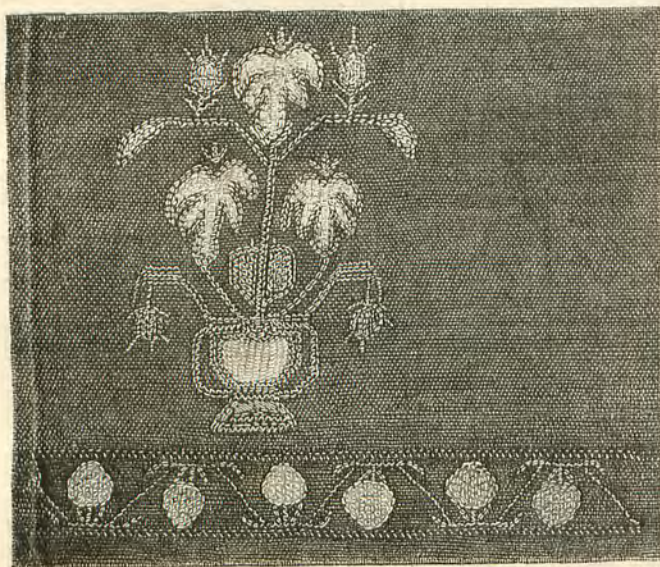
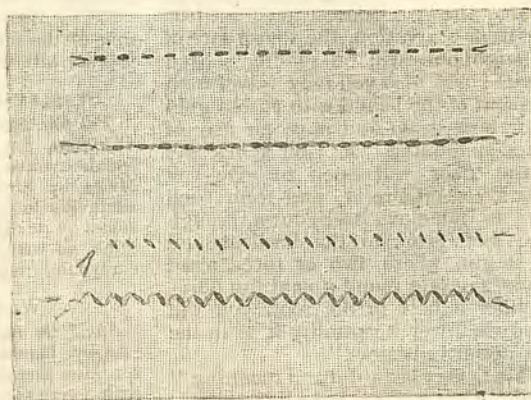
I HAVE no doubt that many of the readers of THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER are already acquainted with this beautiful work from the numbers of specimens of it, old and new, which have been brought to England for sale, since the Turco-Russian war of 1877 made so many thousands of the population of Eastern Roumelia and Bulgaria homeless, friendless, and poor. The population were Mussulman, and, for fear of the Russian army, on its approach they fled before it, abandoning everything—houses, lands, furniture, and goods—all and everything—to avoid falling into the hands of the enemy. They are not allowed to return; their homes are destroyed, their land confiscated, and people who were wealthy, or at least possessed of sufficient means of support, are now dependent on their own personal exertions for the bread they eat. The pretty embroidery wrought for the ornamentation of their clothes and their houses has become their sole means of obtaining the wherewithal for their subsistence, with the weaving of cotton cloth or muslin; for, like the women of ancient times, they both spun and wove the material they wore as underlinen, and employed for household use.

It seems a pitiful tale, does it not? and one difficult to realise by us, who dwell safely in our sea-girt isle, and are "quiet from fear of evil." We can hardly form a picture of ourselves in imagination driven from our homes by a pitiless enemy, deprived of all save the small amount we could carry about us, and sent out of our native land penniless. And we must remember, too, that (although Chris-

tians regard it as a mistaken one) this has been patiently endured for their faith, and that they are not "idolaters," but worship the same God as we do, holding the Jewish revelation as true, and believing in the Jewish prophets as well as in the false prophet, Mahomet. I am glad to hear that a good clergyman has devoted himself entirely to them, and has made his home in Constantinople, on purpose to preach to them the faith as it is in Christ, and declared in the New Testament.

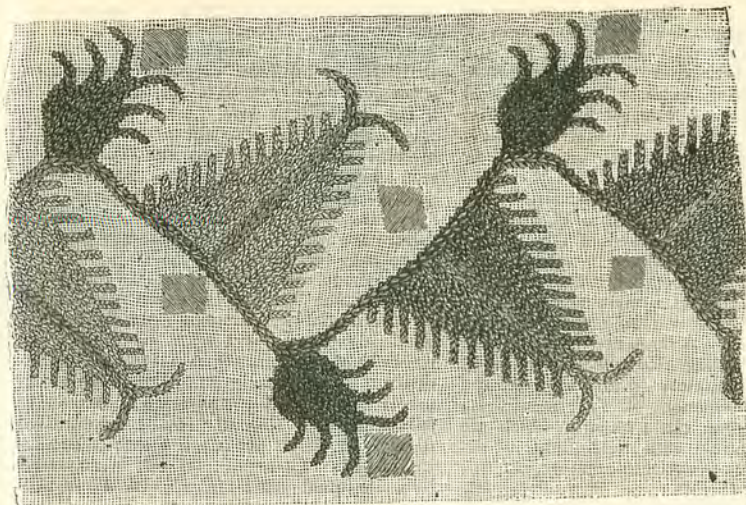
The Turkish Government was very kind to them, received them at Constantinople, and located large numbers in the provinces of Asia Minor, where employment has been found for them. Those remaining are very poor. Of the women, many are widows, and they gain a meagre and precarious livelihood as washerwomen, and by weaving and embroidery, while the men are carters, porters, vendors of fruit, etc.

The embroiderers number about 2,000, and most of them had



occupied a good social position in their own country, and they are strikingly ladylike and refined. All of them, both men and women, are patient and wonderfully quiet and enduring, bearing their hard lot most uncomplainingly. When their present miserable surroundings are taken into account, the work they send to England is a marvel in the way of cleanliness and beauty. It is the same on both sides, like that described by the mother of Sisera, and is beautifully executed.

The embroiderers are of two kinds. First, the superior and the best, who work by counting the threads of the cloth, or muslin-like fabric, on which they work without a pattern, and generally without any design, save those suggested as they work by their own good taste, and carried out by very superior skill. This is the most beautiful kind of work, but, alas! as may be imagined, the most trying to the worker's sight, the result being that most of the women have weak eyes, and that the young girls, in many instances, are compelled to have recourse



to spectacles. The work, too, takes a very long time to do, one small d'oyley needing two or three days for its execution.

The second class of embroiderers are those who work over a pattern previously traced for them, without counting the threads—an easier method, and much less trying to the eyes. So much do they work in ancient grooves that sometimes a particular pattern can only be executed by one woman. This is the case with certain famous designs, such as the Sultan's monogram, and various peculiar inscriptions in the mosques. Of course, they can also embroider to order any pattern which may be sent to them, but the lady who superintends and helps them has shown great wisdom in trying to keep them to their original designs, and to their beautiful harmonies and combinations of colours, beside which our Western hues are crude and harsh and our designs less elegant, and appear unsuitable to the materials employed. A few of these have been drawn to illustrate this paper, through the kindness of our considerate Editor, but, alas! they do not give the delightful and well-selected colouring, which so mainly constitutes the beauty of the originals.

The stitches, as the work is the same on both sides, are minute and tiresome in their accomplishment. The two principal stitches I have, with difficulty, discovered, copied, and finally drawn. They interested me marvellously, for, as I pored over them, I felt sure that they were the same stitches that are spoken of in the Bible, and are as old nearly as mother Eve herself.

The first is a straight stitch, and is worked by making an even row of running. When the thread or the pattern is finished, take a fresh thread, and put the needle in and out of the first row of running, so as to cover the blank spaces in it, being careful to take the exact

place where the first stitch began and ended, and turning the work while doing it, so as to see that it is the same on both sides. Put the needle in from the back to the front, otherwise the white threads will show when not wanted.

The other stitch is a zig-zag one, and is worked by making an even row of "teeth" stitches, from right to left, bringing the needle out after every stitch on the lower line. At the end of the first row turn the work round, and take the needle back, filling up the dotted lines. Remember to look at the back of the work constantly, that the needle may go out and in by the thread.

A third stitch is used for the centres of flowers, and is a kind of lace stitch, used on loosely-woven materials. It is worked by overcasting three or four threads, in horizontal lines, and then dividing the perpendicular lines into three or four threads, and overcasting them. A tiny design of openwork squares is thus produced, which has a very pretty effect.

I have not yet devoted a word to the material, woven by the embroiderers themselves, on which the work is performed. It is a loosely-woven muslin made of cotton, which, being spun by hand, and woven by a hand loom, has, of course, a great deal more substance in it than our materials, spun and woven by machinery. In hue, it is a charming cream colour, but it takes a black dye very well indeed. Here we have an imitation, as well as in

America, but it is very different to the real thing. In America, and in the different schools of art needlework in both countries, this loosely-woven muslin is called "momie (or mummy) cloth," and is very largely used for embroidery, and for all kinds of curtains, chairbacks, and sometimes for dress also, though not so often. There is a crinkled striped variety of it in white, as well as one with red threads, which are most suitable for dresses for young girls, and pinafores for little children. The washing and wearing qualities are endless, and the price is so moderate that any of our girls can manage to purchase it. The plain muslin is 1s. 4d., and the striped 1s. 6d. a yard; both are about 19 inches wide, with a good firm selvedge on both sides, so that it may be used for chair-backs, or other embroidery, beautifully.

At present the articles manufactured consist of d'oyleys, fichus, collars and cuffs, parasols, antimacassars, tablecovers, curtains, and trimmings for dresses, some of the designs of which are illustrated. Of course, the work can be adapted to any other purpose, and any articles can be made to order, and of any shades, designs, or materials required. The gold and silver thread used are of pure metal, and do not tarnish—in fact, they look better after being cleaned than before, in every case where the experiment has been tried.

These poor refugees are fortunate in having found an advocate in England who can feel for them and give her best energies to help them. I refer to Miss Constance M. Finn, the daughter of the late well-known and much lamented consul at Jerusalem. She was born in the East, and knows the natives and settlers, their wants and their sorrows, and will be glad to answer all inquiries, and take orders for both the embroidery and the materials woven by these helpless people. Her address is The Elms, Brook Green, Hammersmith.

