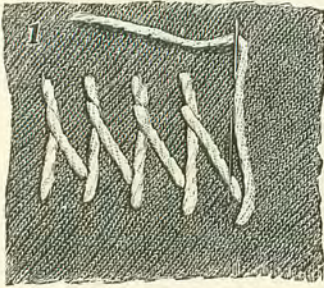


NINE USEFUL STITCHES.

BY JOSEPHA CRANE.

A KNOWLEDGE of various kinds of fancy stitches is extremely useful, for they can often be adapted to many kinds of embroidery.

Some of the prettiest stitches are the easiest,



and strangely enough in all old embroideries the same kind of stitches are found which are often offered to us as quite new. It might almost be said about them as of other things, that there is nothing new under the sun.

For example, if we look back to the history of drawn-linen work, we discover it to be one of the most ancient forms of decorative needle-work, and herring-bone stitch, with very slight variation, is found in all Eastern embroidery, whether ancient or modern.

There is an art, however, in adapting your stitches to the texture upon which you place them, and I shall quote here what Lady M. Alford says on this subject in her valuable work on embroidery. In writing of white embroidery she says:—

“I imagine it was a very ancient form of the art, and was practised first in mediæval days, when we begin to have constant notices of it. The first white laces appear to have followed close upon the first white embroideries. There is a tomb of the fourteenth century in the church of the Ara Cœli in Rome, where the effigy of the knight lies on his bed, draped with a sheet and a coverlet, both embroidered. These are evidently of linen, worked in white.

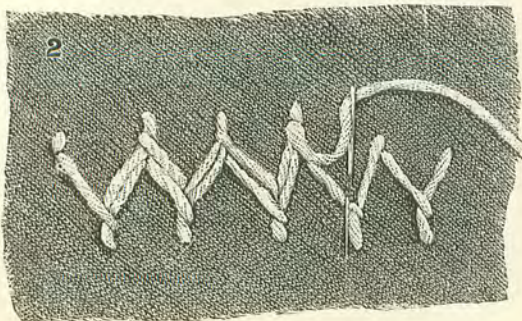
“From that date we find continually mention of such work by nuns and ladies.”

In a foot-note we read:—

“St. Catherine of Sienna's winding-sheet is described as being cut-work (*punto tagliato*) on linen. This sounds like embroidery of the type called Madeira work, the pattern being cut out and the edges overcast.”

Again we read:—

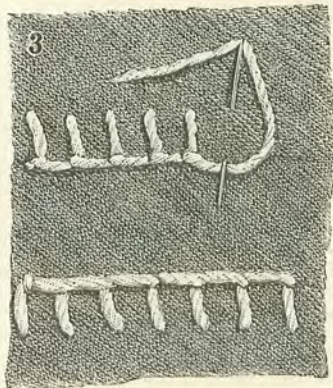
“In England it was specially called nun's



work.” There is a great survival of this stitchery in Italy amongst the peasantry. They have always adorned their smocks and aprons and their head coverings and the

borders of sheets for great occasions with patterns in “flat stitches,” “cut stitches,” and “drawn work.” The Greek peasants do the same. In Germany will be found much curious white embroidery of designs which show their antiquity, and from Spain we get “Spanish work” in black on white linen, which is nearly allied to the stitches of white work. In England alone the peasantry do no white work for home use, and we must suppose it has never been a domestic occupation. Indeed the love of the needle is by no means an English natural tendency in the lower classes. Nothing but the plainest work is taught in our schools. Anything approaching to decorative art with us, has been the accomplishment of educated women, and not the employment in leisure moments in the houses of the poor.

“Semper,” in *Der Stil*, gives rules for white embroidery, and the reasons from which he deduces them are good. He says, that allowing it as a maxim that each textile has its own uses and its own beauties, we should place nothing on linen which would militate against its inherent qualities and merits; and that, as the great beauty of flax is its smoothness and purity, all projections and roughnesses should be avoided which would catch dust or cast a



shadow. Carrying out this idea, it would appear that satin and not lace stitches are therefore the most suitable for this kind of decoration. The accepted rule for selecting the stitch for each piece of work is this:—“On stout grounds the threads should be round and rich, whereas delicate materials carry best the most refined and shining threadwork, and in embroidering the smooth surface of linen fabrics, the flattest stitches are the most appropriate.”

The stitches before you vary as to the purposes for which they are suited.

Figs. 1 and 2 are different stages of the same stitch, for which I have as yet not discovered any name. I have seen it used in embroidery done with fine crewels, and shading is easily accomplished by having rows of the stitch in different shades. It can be used for petals, leaves, etc., and will be found a very useful stitch.

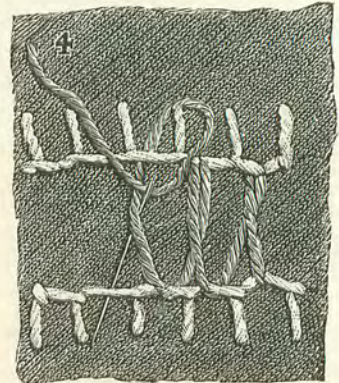
Bring your needle up from the back to the front of the material.

Then put it in above the place where your thread comes out from, at the height you wish the width of the stitch to be.

Put your needle in and then out in the same

vertical direction. In short the stitch resembles herring bone as far as the upper row goes, excepting that the needle is always placed vertically and not in a horizontal direction.

Keep your thread to your right as you make the upper part of the stitch and also when you make the lower.



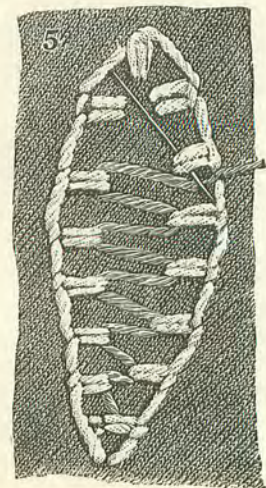
For the next row as seen in Fig. 2, you turn your work round.

Make a row exactly the same as the first, going so close to the first row that you completely conceal the material upon which your embroidery is placed. Always turn your work at the beginning of a new row. The next three examples are of Mexican stitch. This can be done so quickly and easily that it will soon become a favourite with many people, and curiously enough it is very little known.

Look at Fig. 3. You will see that keeping the thread under the needle you work exactly as if you were going to make a button-hole edging, only placing each stitch at a little distance from its predecessor.

Make the stitches of each row either opposite each other as in Fig. 3, or else intermediately as in Fig. 5. This varies the way in which the next part is done.

In Fig. 4 you see how a thread of a different



colour is passed in and out. Keep your thread over your needle and that will ensure the pretty twisted appearance seen in the illustration.

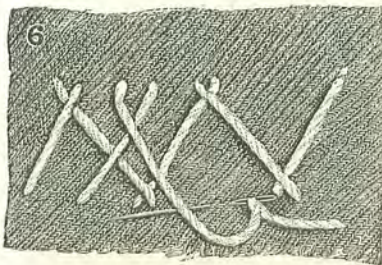
It must be remembered that both button-hole stitching as well as the centre thread must be pretty stout if the stitch is placed on a thick material. Let me give you an example of what I mean. On art serge tapestry wool is good, and a most charming variation can be made by doing your twisting with Japanese gold. If your insertion is very wide the twisted thread may need a back stitch in the middle to keep it in its place.

It is obvious, I trust, from the illustration that the needle is passed in and out the bars formed by the button-hole stitch and does not go through the material at all. For this part of the stitch I generally use a rug needle which has a big eye and blunt point. The latter feature is an advantage, as it does not then catch in anything.

On coloured linen this stitch would be very effective if done in flax. You could do the twisted cord part with a coarser number than the button-hole bars.

Once in doing a piece of work on old gold-coloured Roman satin I made a great many leaves in Mexican stitch, and the effect, if I may say so, was lovely. Instead of the button-hole stitch all round as seen in Fig. 5, I merely made little bars of thick heliotrope-coloured silk and placed the opposite sides so that the bars came alternately. Then with a thickness of another shade of heliotrope I passed the needle in and out and worked rope-stitch all round the edge.

I have also used this stitch with very fine silk on the most delicate designs for silk work.



So you see it can be used in a great many ways.

In Fig. 5 you see a leaf done with two stitches of the button-hole work done close together. This button-hole stitch by the way is also called wheeling, and can be used with great effect in embroidering some Arabesque designs, that go in curves and circles. Keep the edge near you and let the points project. A leaf for example, like Fig. 5, could be improved by an outer edge of wheeling if we are to call it by that name, the points projecting all round.

Fig. 6 is double herring-bone.

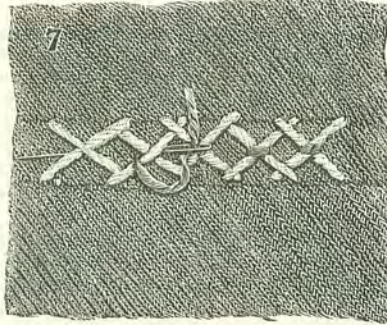
Work one row making your stitches rather far apart. Then work the next row so that the stitches are taken in between those of the first row. If you employ two colours in this, you can get a very pretty effect, and a variation which is very good is to put a back stitch where the lines of the herring-bone cross.

How this is done is seen in Fig. 7.

Fig. 8 shows another kind of herring-bone stitch. This is found in most Oriental embroideries, and you often see entire pieces of work done with this and nothing else. I have found it in Austrian work, Bulgarian, Indian and Turkish. Once I remember seeing a very beautiful table-cover which was of Turkish embroidery, and the entire design was carried out in this stitch.

Please notice carefully that though the stitch is done in the same manner as herring-bone, that the stitch is taken so that the point of the needle comes out to the left of the top line of stitches. If you will but look at the illustration you will see how this is done.

When your needle, if placed as you see it in this illustration is withdrawn, then the stitch is taken in the lower row in precisely the same way. This stitch should be done so closely that the ground is entirely covered.



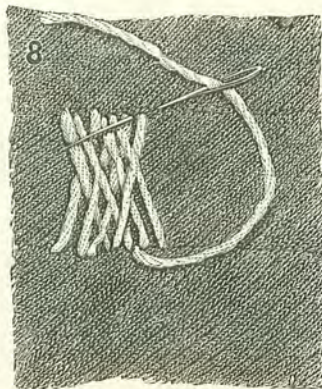
In working leaves, etc., in this stitch where the width varies you graduate down.

Fig. 9 is raised stem stitch.

Take some lengths of cotton if you are working with that material, and then work over them in a diagonal fashion as you see in the example. This is a very simple and easy way of making a raised stem and can be done in wool as well as cotton. It is better to have the cotton you use for the padding the same colour as that with which you are working. It must, however, be remembered that the padding should never show. There is one simple and most effective stitch of which I have given no example because it is so well-known that everyone knows how to do it. I mean chain-stitch.

Now though everyone may know how to do this stitch, yet comparatively few understand how very successfully it can be used in embroideries. Just read what Miss May Morris, the well-known writer on these matters, says about it.

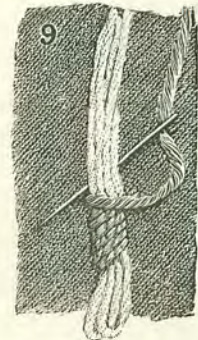
"A good look at any piece of Eastern chain-stitch embroidery will teach you more than any descriptive writing; and supposing that you have such a piece before you, in a show-case of a museum, or, better still, in your own hands for closer inspection, you will note with what certainty and regularity the little flowers are worked, and how suitable this stitch is for long stems and lines. A great deal of the Eastern work on fine muslin, that we see in such abundance in all shops now, is worked in some kind of tambour frame; that is, worked on a rather open stuff stretched



tight, the thread being passed through and back with a hook or tambour needle. It is not difficult to tell this work from the slower needle chain-stitch, as the former has a certain unmistakable evenness and flatness which the latter has not. The great cope of Syon is principally worked in chain-stitch, but worked

with the most inconceivable minuteness, and here and there displaying a daring and originality never ventured on nowadays. The little figures of saints and angels, for instance, have the faces worked in a peculiar manner, starting from the high-light on the cheek-bone, and thence round and round outwards from this point to nose, chin, and throat, the features being outlined with a fine dark thread. This method of using chain-stitch for figure work requires to be seen to be understood, and I would not recommend a student to apply it to her own work, as it is not adaptable to any modern style, and needs both the nerve and simplicity of mediæval design to carry it off. . . . I have, in my mind too, an example of chain-stitch, certain work done in India in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for European buyers. It is very different in style and character, and has not, as it were, the intellectual qualities of ecclesiastical work spoken of above. It usually consists of large hangings and quilts for beds of state, worked on a fine cotton ground, entirely in chain-stitch of one colour. Very rich and effective does this work look in a brilliant yellow, with an irregularly stitched background patterned also in yellow. These hangings and bed-coverings were ordered for state gifts and marriage gifts, the centre being sometimes occupied by the arms and device of the prince or lord for whom they were intended, elaborately interwoven with the design."

The Syon cope alluded to above is a very



wonderful piece of work. It was given by Henry V. about the year 1414 to a convent at Isleworth, and then it was a hundred years old. The nuns travelled about a good deal, and in the reign of Queen Elizabeth they got to Portugal, where they settled down. Not a great while ago the Syon cope was sent from Lisbon to England, and is now to be seen in the South Kensington Museum. Those who are skilled in embroidery have it in their power to beautify many articles for home use. It is wonderful what a difference a little good work makes on some inexpensive article or material. That square of art green serge which you are using to cover that little table would look so much prettier for a little embroidery. A border all the way round in Mexican stitch done in two shades of yellow would be a great improvement.

Then your toilet-covers and bed-spreads. Coloured linen can be beautified by some pretty work, and some of the stitches here named come in very usefully.

For washing materials always use what will wash, and see that your things are carefully treated when sent to the laundry. If you have any very special bit of work done on washing stuff, then let me advise you to wash it yourself. Put a little bran tied up loosely in muslin in the water, and that will keep the colour in if it is holland, and preserve your cottons, if you have worked with coloured cottons. Use no soap with alkali in it, and press, do not wring the article.