

FIG. I.

RUSSIAN CROSS-STITCH EMBROIDERY.

THE subject of national embroideries is a very interesting one, and as an index to national character it is by no means to be despised. Unfortunately, as nations advance in civilisation these national embroideries—many of which are very beautiful—are too often lost. Here in England we have no special national embroidery of our own, but, like the French, we do all sorts and kinds of needle-work, ancient and modern.

In these days, too, Russian ladies do not restrict themselves to their national embroidery any more than Bulgarian and Hungarian ladies do to their own beautiful national embroideries. Russian cross-stitch embroidery, however, suits the Russian woman exceedingly well, though at first sight one would think just the reverse, for it would seem to require almost as much perseverance and industry as the tapestry of our ancestresses to cover entirely a large piece of linen like the sofa-back we are able to reproduce (Fig. 1.) with cross-stitch.

A second glance, however, will show the background only is in cross-stitch; the design is simply worked in outline-stitch. And we may be quite sure very few and far between are the Russian ladies who will trouble to work the background themselves; they will either buy

it worked or hand it over to some one else to do it for them.

The material on which this work is done is a coarse linen, unbleached; it can be obtained with designs traced on it, and the proper cotton, at Messrs. Friedberger's, 150, Brompton Road, who have some very handsome pieces of finished work. The cotton is very soft and not very coarse, and is sold in balls, which do not go very far, for it takes a good deal to ground a large piece of work; it is called simply Russian cotton, and can be had in black, yellow, and any shades of red and blue.

The design itself is, in most of Messrs. Friedberger's work, outlined in a rich thick silk, which has a very handsome effect; but flax thread can be used instead of the silk if preferred, and looks exceedingly well too. Outline-stitch is to be used for the design: the flowers, leaves, or animals are not filled in, they are, as it were, sketched in; just the principal veins of the leaves and flowers and markings of the animals are put in, all in outline-stitch, leaving the bare linen to represent the body of the design. The general effect, when finished, is of a *bas-relief* on a coloured background.

The background can be of any colour: black, yellow, red, or blue are the most effective, but



FIG. II.

there is really no hard and fast rule about it. The Russian national colours can be used ; but this is not *de rigueur*, as it is in some national embroideries. Very much depends, too, on the use to which the work is to be put : red makes a warm background for cushions ; yellow is very effective for sofa- or chair-backs, and black for mantel borders.

The cross-stitch does not look so even as the cross-stitch of Berlin wool work done on canvas, or as German cross-stitch done in

colours were employed. Great care must be taken to keep exactly to the outline and to fill in all the markings accurately, as on this the artistic character of the work depends.

The subjects of the designs are all conventional : flowers and leaves when used are conventionalised ; the work would not lend itself to natural flowers well. Among the principal features of the designs are the animals which are introduced into almost every piece of embroidery ; of these, lions, griffins, and

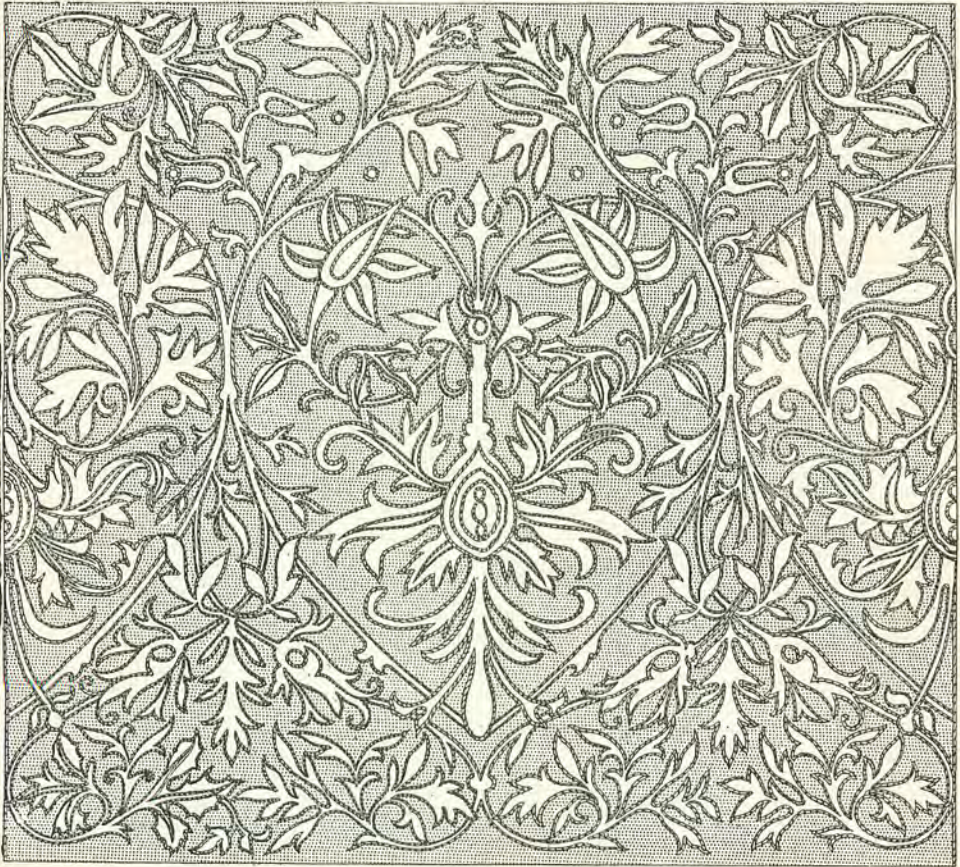


FIG. III.

coloured cottons on canvas cloth ; but this is one of the features of this work. All Messrs. Friedberger's designs are marked out in cross-bars, each square of which represents a stitch, so there is no counting of threads ; all that has to be done is to work a cross-stitch in each little square marked out for that purpose.

For the designs one or two colours are generally sufficient, simplicity being one of the characteristics of the work ; and, indeed, the general effect would be destroyed if too many

dragons are the most popular,³ and they are all highly conventional.

One of the handsomest pieces of finished work at Messrs. Friedberger's was a sofa-back (Fig. I.). This is a very handsome design and contains the characteristic lions, which are produced in a conventional scroll reaching to the end of the design, which, as will be seen, is all highly conventional. The background is worked in cross-stitch in red Russian cotton, the design and the somewhat

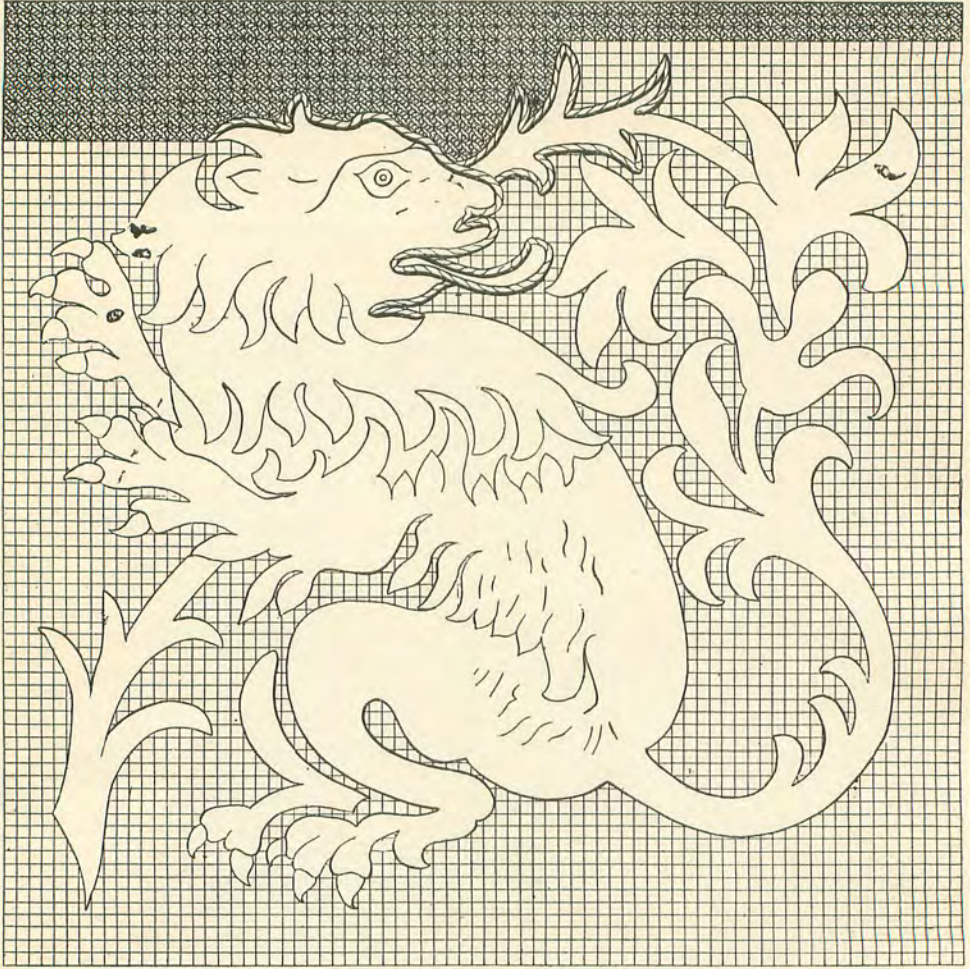


FIG. IV.

elaborate markings in rather pale green silk. The general effect of this beautiful piece of work is excellent.

Another sofa-back (Fig. II.) was quite as effective, but had not quite so rich an effect. In this piece griffins are the creatures which make the principal feature of the design. They and the conventional scroll of leaves which proceeds from their wings—the emblem of their swiftness, as their lion-like bodies are emblems of their strength—are worked in red silk; the very conventional vine, the leaves and grapes, and the conventional flower intertwined with it, are all worked in black silk, while the background is done in cross-stitch in gold-coloured Russian cotton.

The third design which we are able to reproduce is of a sofa-cushion, and is entirely

conventional; the design is worked in outline-stitch in green silk, the background in cross-stitch in red Russian cotton.

Squares which can be joined together for counterpanes and bedspreads can be had, and make very handsome objects. Tablecloths of various sizes are also to be had at Messrs. Friedberger's: these and the articles we have mentioned above are subjects for which this work is best suited; it is less easily adapted to smaller objects. If preferred, designs for counterpanes can be traced on a large piece of linen, as it is made sufficiently wide for the purpose; the squares, however, are much less fatiguing, as they are so much less cumbersome.

The square (Fig. IV.) is a very good size, as it just takes a good lion; it shows clearly how the work is traced and done.