

## CHAPTER II.

## CUTWORK.

“ Et lors, sous vos lacis à mille fenestrages,  
Raiseuls et pointet coupés et tous vos clairs ouvrages.”

*Jean Godard, 1588.*

It is from that open-work embroidery which in the sixteenth century came into such universal use that we must derive the origin of lace, and, in order to work out the subject, trace it through all its gradations.

This embroidery, though comprising a wide variety of decoration, went by the general name of cutwork.

The fashion of adorning linen has prevailed from the earliest times. Either the edges were worked in close embroidery—the threads drawn and fashioned with a needle in various forms—or the ends of the cloth unravelled and plaited with geometric precision.

To judge from the description of the linen grave-clothes of St. Cuthbert, as given by an eye-witness<sup>1</sup> to his disinterment in the twelfth century, they were ornamented in a manner similar to that we have described. “There had been,” says the chronicler, “put over him a sheet . . . . this sheet had a fringe of linen thread of a finger’s length; upon its sides and ends were woven a border of projecting workmanship fabricated of the thread itself, bearing the figures of birds and beasts, so arranged that between every two pairs there were interwoven among them the representation of a branching tree which divides the figures. This tree, so tastefully depicted, appears to be putting forth its leaves,” &c. There can be no doubt that this sheet, for many centuries preserved in the cathedral church of Durham, was a specimen of drawn or cut work, which, though later it came into general use, was at an early period of our history alone used for ecclesiastical purposes, and an art which was, till the dissolution of monasteries, looked upon as a church secret.

<sup>1</sup> Translated from the “*Libellus de Admirandis beati Cuthberti Miraculis*,” of Reginald, monk of Durham, by Rev. J. Rain. Durham, 1855.