

THE CLEVELAND TAPESTRY EXHIBITION

BY GEORGE LELAND HUNTER

THE inspirational value of tapestries is supreme. More than any other form of art it can be used in lecture promenades to attract the attention, hold the interest, and develop the taste. Combining in themselves as they do story interest, with picture interest and texture interest, they also appeal with their architecture, draperies, robes, hats, jewelry, furniture, rugs, tiles, lamps and lighting fixtures, and other forms of decorative art presented clearly and on a large scale.

A practical demonstration of this in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* of December 1st, was the illustrated page of costumes sketched by the *Plain Dealer* artist from the loan exhibition of tapestries organized by me for the Cleveland Museum of Art. "Paris" says Miss Glazier, who wrote the text of the page, "leads the fashion world. In rare old Gothic and Renaissance webs, and later in her own precious Gobelin and Beauvis tapestries, with their thousand combinations of perfect line and color, Paris finds the key to the changes rung on lovely woman's gowns and gauds. When will America take a long forward step toward leadership in fashion designing? When such works of art are habitually studied and digested here. With memories of tight sleeves, big sleeves, bell skirts, hobble skirts, flat hats, high hats, tightly buttoned basques and Mother Hubbards, mingling with remembered illustrations from the Bible dictionary and novels of the time of the crusaders, of Louis XIV and of Good Queen Bess," writes Miss Glazier, "I went through the tapestry exhibition. They were all there; yes, there we have the originals of every

blessed one of them. Take the fourteenth century Gothic tapestry of 'King Arthur' with the long perpendicular lines. One of the archbishops has on sister's party cape, and the wise old graybeard in the lower left corner surely sports the originals of the angel sleeves of a few decades ago. In the early fifteenth century tapestry 'Vintage,' the men are smooth shaven; and most of them wear smocks such as society damsels gardened in last summer. Their shoes are less pointed and more comfortable; and hats like inverted flower pots carry out the pastoral scheme. But the women. Imagine the ice cream cone of a giant, with yards of veiling flowing from the pointed tip—that was the head-dress of the noble ladies, something not yet attained to in any modern vogue. But the loops of hair over the ears prove that Cléo de Mérode did not invent the mode named for her; and suspenderlike adornments, springing from a broad belt, show where one of the modern 'pretty accessories' of the modern fashion papers springs from."

Through the whole gamut of styles, from fourteenth century to eighteenth, Miss Glazier hurried, pointing out the wealth of material that invites American milliners and dressmakers to the study of tapestries. With her point of view I am completely in sympathy. I should, indeed, continue to love tapestries even if they had not practical value. But I should not, and I wish to make the negation as strong as words can do it, I should not devote time and energy to organizing tapestry exhibitions and conducting lecture promenades for thousands of museum



KING ARTHUR

LENT BY DUVEEN BROTHERS

A FOURTEENTH CENTURY GOTHIC TAPESTRY

visitors, unless the inspirational value of tapestries in life and industry were supreme.

Especially great at the present time is the practical and patriotic value of exhibitions of tapestries. Under war conditions, the art side of American industries began to flourish as never before. Damasks, brocades and velvets, chintzes and cretonnes and wall papers that we used to import, we were compelled to produce for ourselves. Under the direction of importing houses, and with the aid of all the technical and artistic ability at their command, European samples were given with generous orders to American manufacturers for reproduction. Exclusive decorators who had avoided domestic goods before turned to them in the hour of necessity.

But if we are to continue to hold our American markets after the war, and gain others in the face of renewed European competition, we must continue to elevate

the standards of our art industries, and learn to rival even the French in matters of style and taste. We must teach our public to demand better art and encourage our manufacturers to produce it, even if for a time the "bread and butter" stuff has to carry the expense of expansion in an upward direction.

In the development of the textile and related industries, texture is of prime importance. Of damasks, velvets, brocades, carpets and rugs, the texture is even more significant than the design. Wall papers do not suggest texture agreeably and effectively, unless the maker understands the actual structure of the surfaces imitated. Yet to texture most American eyes are comparatively blind.

Here tapestries have a special mission. The texture of tapestries is so complex and at the same time so fascinating, that it is a liberal education for all other textures. It represents the highest achievement of warp



FLORA, THE GODDESS OF SPRING

LENT BY WILLIAM BAUMGÄRTEN & CO.

A LOUIS XIV BRUSSELS TAPESTRY

and woof. The contrast of horizontal ribs with vertical hatchings, supplemented by contrast of wool with silk (and often with gold and silver), and also by the accentuation of horizontal and of stepped lines due to the open slits left where colors meet parallel with the warp, produces without heavy shadows a more definite separation of relief from depression than can in any other way be produced on a flat surface. For example, note the marvelous deep folds of the robes in Late Gothic tapestries like the "Marriage of King David" shown at the Cleveland exhibition.

Texture is of tapestries their fundamental characteristic. Texture is what distinguishes pictured clothes of the type developed in Europe in the fourteenth century, from Chinese, Saracenic, Coptic, Peruvian, and other "primitive tapestries." The part of a tapestry due to the bobbin, is vastly more vital than the part due to the brush. In other words, the chance of

success when a skillful master weaver tackles a bad design, is much greater than when a stupid master weaver attempts a good design.

Partly due to the splendid opportunity for hanging tapestries effectively, partly owing to a chain of fortunate circumstances, the loan exhibition at the Cleveland Museum of Art proved to be the most noteworthy ever held on this side of the Atlantic, and from the educational and historical point of view, perhaps never surpassed anywhere.

To those who by their generosity and public spirit made this extraordinary exhibition possible, the city, the state, and the country are deeply indebted.

The Cleveland owners represented were: Mrs. F. F. Prentiss, Mr. Howard P. Eells, Mr. W. G. Mather, Hon. Myron T. Herrick, Mr. J. H. Wade, Mrs. E. W. Haines, Mr. H. G. Dalton, Mr. John L. Severance, and the Cleveland Museum of Art.



HOSPITALITY

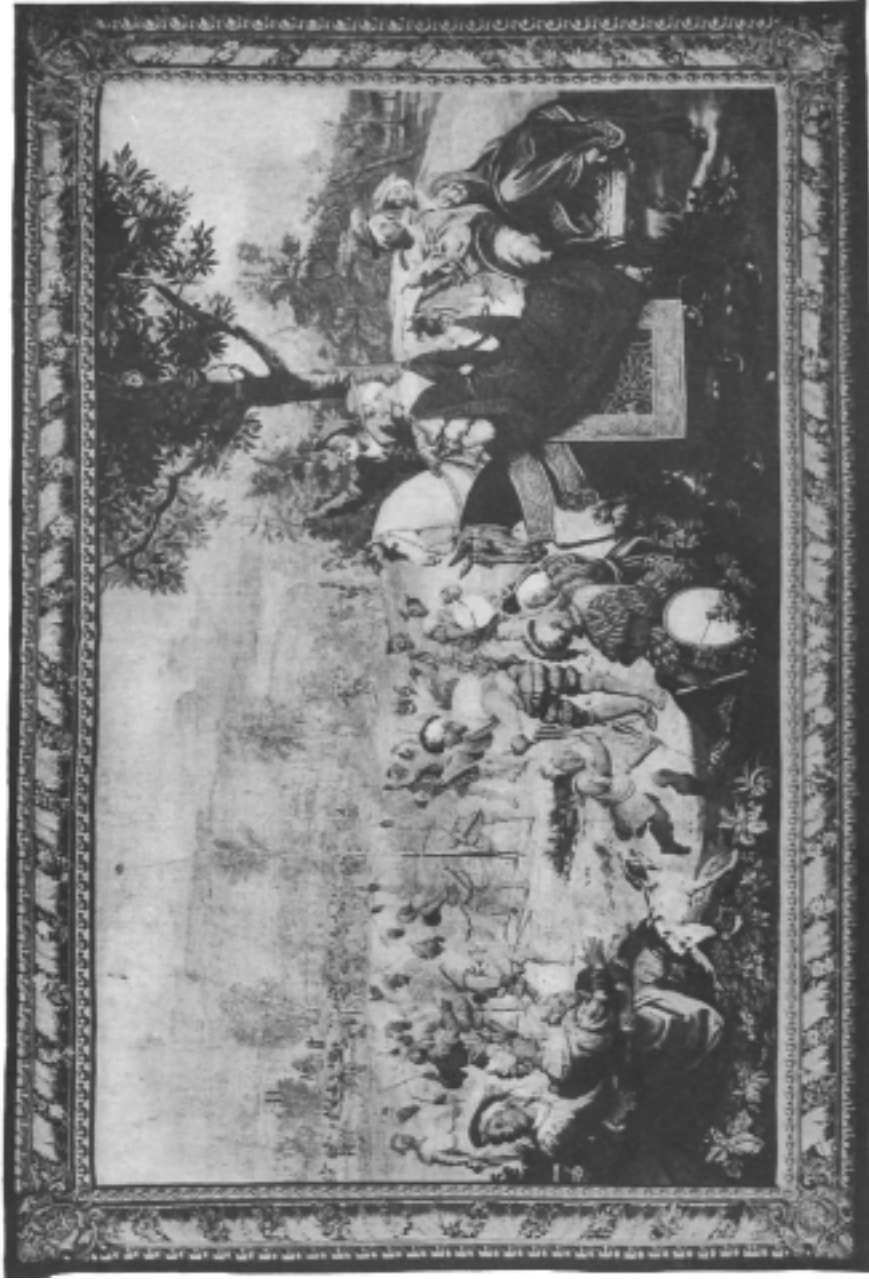
A FIFTEENTH CENTURY GOTHIC TAPESTRY
LENT BY DUVEEN BROTHERS

The New York dealers represented were: Duveen Bors., Gimpel & Wildenstein, Jacques Seligmann, L. Alavoine & Co., Wm. Baumgarten & Co., Warwick House, Dawson, Lewis & Simmons, Herter Looms, Edgewater Tapestry Looms.

Of the tapestries illustrated "King Arthur" is by far the most unusual. It is the only large fourteenth century tapestry with which I am acquainted except the famous Apocalypse set at Angers. The architectural framing is extraordinary. My identification of King Arthur was of course due to his coat of arms, three golden crowns on azure, appearing not only on his breast, but also on the pennant that floats from the end of his lance. What the British Arthur looked like, they did not know any better in the fourteenth century than we know now, and the likeness they gave him is that of a king of the period. King Arthur also appears, identified by his coat of arms, in the "Triumph of Christ" tapestry at the Brussels Museum, and the "Charlemagne" tapestry of Mr. George

Blumenthal, both woven over a century later. (See plates 370, 371 of Hunter's "Tapestries, Their Origin, History and Renaissance.")

In this tapestry King Arthur wears his coat of arms not only on the pennant that floats from his lance but also upon his breast. He is fully armored and his left hand draws a sword from its sheath. He is seated in a throne chair and framed in Gothic architecture of the same type as appears in the famous fourteenth century set of Apocalypse tapestries at the Cathedral of Angers. Indeed, the resemblance between this tapestry and the Apocalypse set is in every way striking. Just as the main personage in each of the Apocalypse sets occupies the full height of the tapestry, while the other scenes are in two rows, one above the other; so here Arthur occupies the full height of the tapestry, and on each side of him are lesser personages arranged in a double tier; above, two archbishops standing in the balconies with archepiscopal cross on staff; below, two bishops with



MAY

LENT BY MRS. F. F. PRENTISS

A GOBELIN MONTH OF LUCAS



DON QUIXOTE KILLING SHEEP

LENT BY MRS. E. W. HAINES

AN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY BRUSSELS TAPESTRY

episcopal crozier (derived not from the cross but from the shepherd's staff). Noteworthy are the jewels displayed by the bishops and archbishops on their mitres, fastening their cloaks, and on the backs of their hands. Arthur, like the two lesser warriors in the extreme left, has a long flowing beard and long flowing hair of the same type as seen in the Apocalypse.

"Hospitality" pictures in great detail a French-Flemish dinner of the last quarter of the fifteenth century. The aged host in the words of the French inscription at the top of the tapestry welcomes his guests by saying: "The man wise at pleasing the ladies, first has preparations made for eat-

ing." In the foreground, a page pours wine from a flagon into a small shallow bowl like the one that the smart gentleman with triple-plumed hat, braided inner collar, ermine outer collar, and huge necklace is lifting from the table towards his lips. On the table, a dish of squabs, square flat plates, pointed knives, and *no forks*. Before the fire, the cook making hot cakes. In the lower left corner a cat with the rampant fur that indicates the presence of a dog in the room.

"The Messenger," an Early Renaissance tapestry with delightful Van Orley border, but with panel that went wrong in the cartooning. The costumes are of the period when the Emperor Charles V was



THE MESSENGER

LENT BY MR. J. H. WADE

AN EARLY RENAISSANCE TAPESTRY

still young and all the world seemed good to him and his bride Isabella.

"Flora," is one of the brilliant tapestries woven at Brussels under the influence of the French style of Louis XIV, and for that reason commonly called Louis XIV Brussels now, but formerly often sold as Gobelins. A similar tapestry by the same designer (Louis van Schoor of Antwerp who signed it) was shown at the Philadelphia Tapestry exhibition, and is now in the collection of Mrs. E. T. Stotesbury. Another brilliant example of the same type, probably from the design of Jean van Orley,

is the "Bacchus and Ariadne" of Mrs. Frederic Pratt in Buffalo.

"May," one of the famous "Months of Lucas" designed by Lucas van Leyden in the first half of the sixteenth century, was reproduced with a new border at the Gobelins in the first half of the eighteenth century by Audran whose signature appears in the lower right corner of the panel. The sport illustration, archery, is traditionally associated with the month of May. The lady and gentleman on horseback are the Emperor Charles V and his bride Isabella. Note the double-headed eagle of the Empire



VERTUMNUS AND POMONA

LENT BY GIMPEL AND WILDENSTEIN

A BEAUVAIS-BOUCHER TAPESTRY

on her saddle cloth. Mrs. E. H. Harriman has five of the original "Months of Lucas" woven at Brussels in the sixteenth century.

"Vertumnus and Pomona," is so exquisite in tone that I selected it in 1912 for reproduction in color as the frontispiece of my book on tapestries. The story is that of the Roman God of the Seasons, Vertumnus, who disguised himself as an old woman in order to have an opportunity to talk confidentially with Pomona the

Goddess of Fruit who was a man hater. Thus disguised he won her confidence and told her stories of other maidens who had spurned suitors only to be sorry for it afterwards, until when he finally returned to his own youthful and manly form, she threw herself in his arms with a willing "Yes."

For descriptions and stories of the other tapestries exhibited, especially of Mrs. Prentiss' Beauvais-Boucher Chinese Fair

that spent 150 years in China, having been sent as a present to the Emperor Kien-lung by the French King Louis XV, I refer my readers to the inexpensive catalogue of the exhibition published by the Cleveland Museum of Art.