

TAPESTRY: ITS
ORIGIN AND
USES
BY DELIA
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PART IV.
THE GOYA
TAPESTRIES

To the historic *ateliers* of Madrid is due the fabrication of the remarkable series of tapestries famous as being the creation of Goya. These looms were inaugurated by Van der Gotten in 1720. Although designed for the decoration of the suburban palace "El Pardo," many of the tapestries may be seen to-day adorning the sombre walls of the Escorial. Several pieces are unhappily missing—revolutionary vandalism!

Goya invests this work with the thoroughly national character which distinguishes this painter, who, moreover, endows his scenes throughout those tapestries with the eloquent gifts of the satirist. One stroke from the pencil of Don Francisco annihilates the swagger of pretentious wealth, one demi-daub scratched into a streak of light suffices to produce a personage, supposed to be disguised, but recognizable at a glance. Human respect was a quality unknown to the painter, and we find his amusing pencil impartially twitting or flagellating government ministers and their satellites, and giving to posterity in those renowned classic cartoons the society beauties, duchesses, marchionesses, etc., whose small frailties his scorn spares not.

Goya was painting at Rome when he received from Raphael Mengs, the director of the Madrid *ateliers*, the proposal that decided his return to Madrid. Mengs had been commanded to fabricate tapestries destined to the suite of apartments occupied by the heir to the Spanish throne, the Prince of Asturias, who resided at the palace "El Pardo."

To expect Goya to paint with the calm carefulness of detail and correctness of drawing demanded by tapestry, was to ignore the character of the artist, who dashed off the first cartoons as a school-boy rushes through a dictation, never lifting his pencil, nor troubling as to the effect, only dwelling, indeed, with loving care upon that which pleased him. This was not precisely the class of work that Mengs expected, and the cartoons were sent back to Goya with a request that they should be corrected. This was the one pull-up ever experienced by Goya in his whole career. The artist, with the humility only found in genius, repaired his dashing errors.

One of those *corrected* cartoons is renowned as the most beautiful in the charming series. It is known as "The Blind Musician," a pearl in drawing, colour, expression, and in the admirable loom interpretation. The blind man, surrounded by all the accessories, plays a guitar. The picturesque groups in the provincial bright-hued costume, the variety of the types introduced, and the rapt expression of the musician and of his listeners invest this tapestry with rare beauty.

A painter less gifted than our artist might have sought his models (as Fenelon in his pen suggestions, also designed for the instruction of a prince) in the fables of antiquity, but Goya goes straight to the issue, and places before his prince the people, now in joy, now in sorrow, with an intense realism which rivals his *genre* paintings.

Under the scorching sun of a Madrid August noon-day we discover the figure of the bread-winner. The arid, cruel heat, the glaring rays, seem to gloat upon the victim, and even the spectator feels as though he, too, grew hotter while he gazes; and again, presumably, by way of pendant, another scene: "The snow falls, the bleak wintry sky looks cold, a human form, that of a woman, lies huddled together in a vain effort to obtain street shelter; the face is wan and pinched, her teeth seem to chatter, her ragged, thin gown clings to her protruding bones—realism to the core, the bitter truth!"

Grave or gay, Goya paints as the spirit moves him, and a charming page in the folk-lore of his country greets the prince in the merry-making of his future subjects, as in the village fair, the rustic picnic, the bull-fight, and the Andalusian half-masked love trysts, a relic from the troubadour period, which still cleaves to this shadow of romance in the extreme south of Spain, and may be seen in our reproduction.

Children, a favourite subject upon those dainty hangings, are frequently utilised to conceal doorways, so disfiguring an element to the harmony of our British drawing-rooms. Doors are an invisible



LOVE TRYST IN ANDALUSIA BY GOYA



THE CROCKERY VENDOR BY GOYA

The Connoisseur

quantity within the walls of Spanish aristocratic residences.

Kite flying is another of the popular interpretations given us by Goya, a subject which possessed a scientific importance at once seized upon by the Spaniard, although apparently a mere pastime. The kite, as we know, was the favourite toy of the Orientals throughout the ages, and was introduced by that race into Spain, where this simple mode of lifting to a height in the air a certain object recommended itself especially for military purposes, as signalling, carrying flags, etc. The piece is designed by the painter in the simple rural style proper to the subject, the absorbed expression observed in the countenances, as well as the play of light on the scene, illustrating forcibly to what a degree of perfection had attained in that period the *ateliers* of Van der Gotten at Madrid.

In the Goya tapestries there is no preconceived plan, the author never had recourse to that commonplace requirement—calculation. Goya only needed the measurement of the space to be filled up by his inspired pencil.

A famous French critic, referring to those *genre* tapestries, says: "The hand of the lion is visible in his most careless work, a few touches from his magic pencil tell you more than the most lucid description, and from his capacity of working in this off-hand manner, his style is admirably adapted to popular representation." As for Van Eyck, realism had its fascinations for Goya. This artist has been called the connecting link between traditional art and "the violent awakening," but Goya's methods of expressing new ideas, entirely differ from those of his contemporaries.

Inimitable is our artist in the humorous power which seizes on the weak and comic side of his subject, no satire of Goya needing even the medium resorted to by some celebrated painters—explanatory lines. There is to-day probably among our modern

artists more correctness in the form, but less of that which makes up life; more science, in a word, but infinitely less art than that of Goya.

Goya's earlier studies at Madrid were guided by the Spanish master, Jordan, and the Italian, Corrado Giaquinto, who then lived at the Spanish Court.

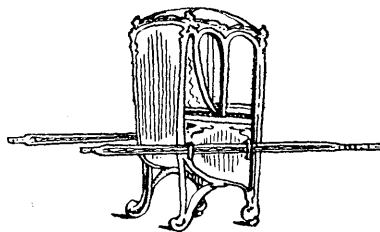
It is asserted by some writers that Goya literally fought his way through *en route* for Rome; being too poor to manage the expenses, he joined a "bull fight touring company to the frontiers."

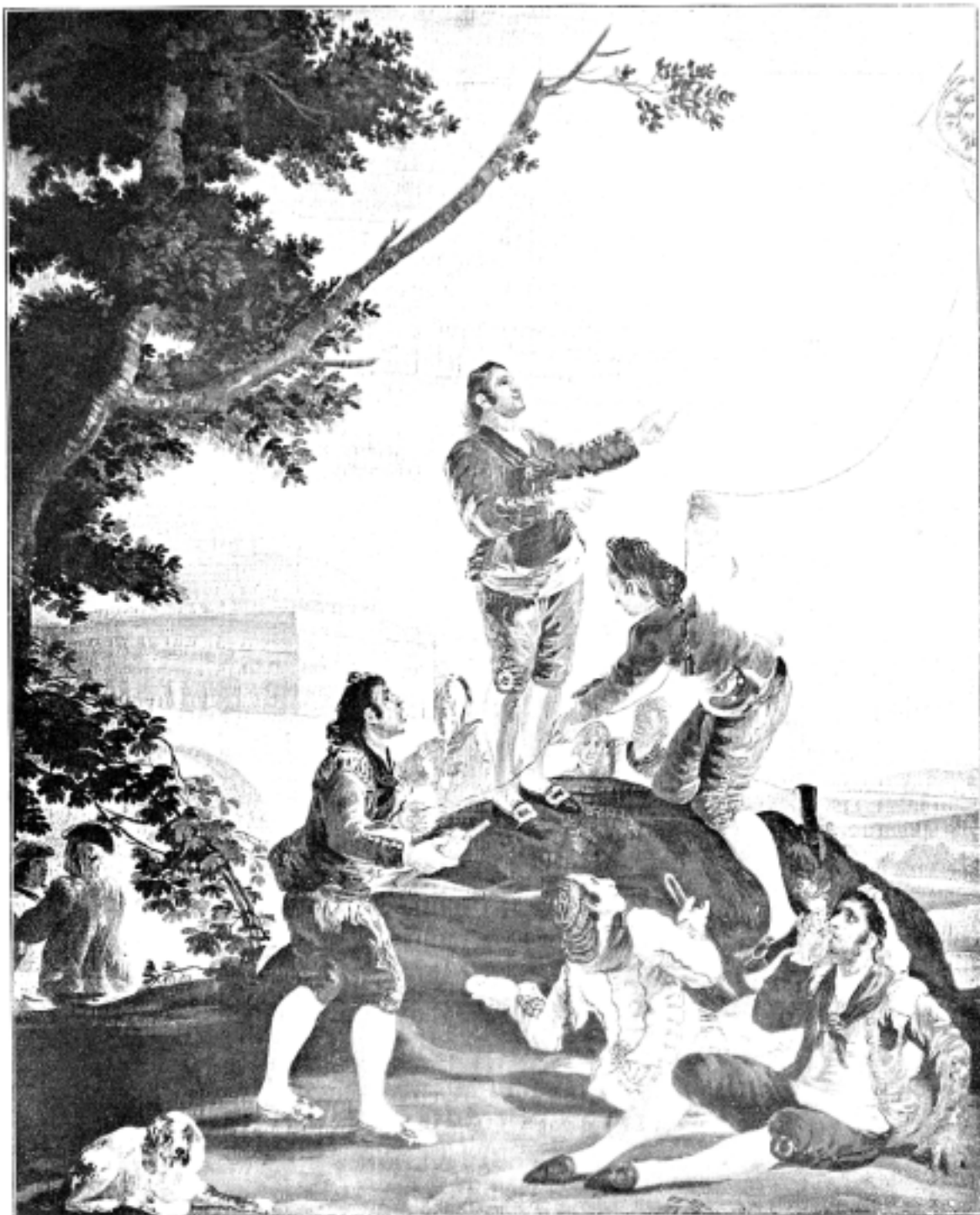
The *ateliers* founded by Van der Gotten were contributed to not alone by Goya. We find also collaborating the painters Van Loo, Conrado, Giuquinto, Teniers, Wouverman and Mengs.

Van der Gotten was succeeded in the direction of the Madrid *ateliers* by another Flemish tapestry worker, whose lineal descendant directs to-day those historic looms. The workers who turn out to-day the exquisite tapestries ordered by Spain's aristocratic elements are also direct descendants of the old Flemings who inaugurated the work. Thus the law of heredity may here be observed in the one centre of this handicraft, which preserves unchanged the ancient traditions of tapestry.

BORDERS.

Until about the end of the fifteenth century the borders of those tapestry pieces, generally narrow, were adorned with green and purple grapes, apples, pears, and other fruits, alternating with flowers; later, birds of divers coloured plumage were wrought into these garlands, and, again, nude children were added to the birds. The borders of the "Acts of the Apostles" are a world in themselves, the fates, the seasons, the hours, satyrs, grotesques, coats of arms. Raphael has displayed all the richness of his imagination, united to his perfect sense of fitness in this decorative work. Giulio Romano was the designer of the borders for the series representing Romulus, or the foundation of Rome.





KITE FLYING BY GOYA