

PLYING THE NEEDLE AND THE BOBBIN TO-DAY

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ARE the arts of plying the needle and the bobbin to be considered as belonging only to the past, or shall they be encouraged in the United States to-day? In the answer to this question lie problems not only of the preservation and continuation of these arts, but of matters of sociologic, economic, and national importance.

Many will say that inventions have relegated handiwork into the past and that machinery can turn out better and cheaper goods than can be made by hand. Granting this for moderate and lower priced objects, those that are needed by the thousand yards, there still remains the fact that the success of the manufactured article depends chiefly upon the design; that is, it depends upon the idea of an individual, executed by hand and later translated in such a way that it can be repeated in quantities by the machine. The American manufacturer, deprived by the war of his foreign-trained designer, will find himself far behind in the struggle for trade unless he wakes up and helps in establishing industrial art schools in the United States.

The economic importance of industrial art in the commercial development of this country has been recognized by the Bureau of Education at Washington, through the recent publication of a thirty-two-page pamphlet entitled, "Industrial Art, a National Asset," which contains a series of graphic charts and descriptive text by H. M. Kurtzworth, director of the Grand Rapids School of Art and Industry.

The sociological influences of the handicraft are hinted at in the above-mentioned pamphlet, which states that: "The effect of environment upon

character and the industrial arts upon environment indicates definitely now, as it has in previous chapters of the history of the race, that the fate of the Nation lies in the hands of the workmen and designers even more than warriors or statesmen. In choice of the furnishings of American homes, two-thirds of which, by the way, must be chosen according to the dictates of incomes of less than \$15 per week, the average citizen finds his chief opportunity to express his instinct for the beautiful. Imagine the effect for good or evil of over one hundred and two million 'artists' thus creating an environment in over eighteen million dwellings for the increasing twenty-two million families."

And what of the power of the other third whose incomes are over \$15 a week? For whom were the beautiful old tapestries, embroideries, and laces made? For the wealthy of the fifteenth, sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries who wanted the work of artists to adorn special places in their homes, their churches, and their municipal buildings. It was not beneath the dignity of Raphael to design the cartoons for the Vatican tapestries, and Boucher and others did a similar service in their time, while Holbein is known to have designed as small a thing as the decoration for a lady's needle-case. The nineteenth century alone neglected its designers and did little to encourage its craftsmen! Shall the twentieth century make the same mistakes and go down in history as lacking the vision to encourage its contemporaries even while praising and paying enormous sums for the work of bygone ages?

When hand-woven fabrics, laces, embroideries, and tapestries were made as works of art and for the joy in the work, they were full of human emotion, and live to-day as something rare and beautiful because of the hand touch that no machine can emulate. The love of making things can be reborn and used to great advantage in the world at the present time, and especially in the United States. It will open up avenues of employment to many people who are at present non-wage earners and dependent upon their families for a livelihood.

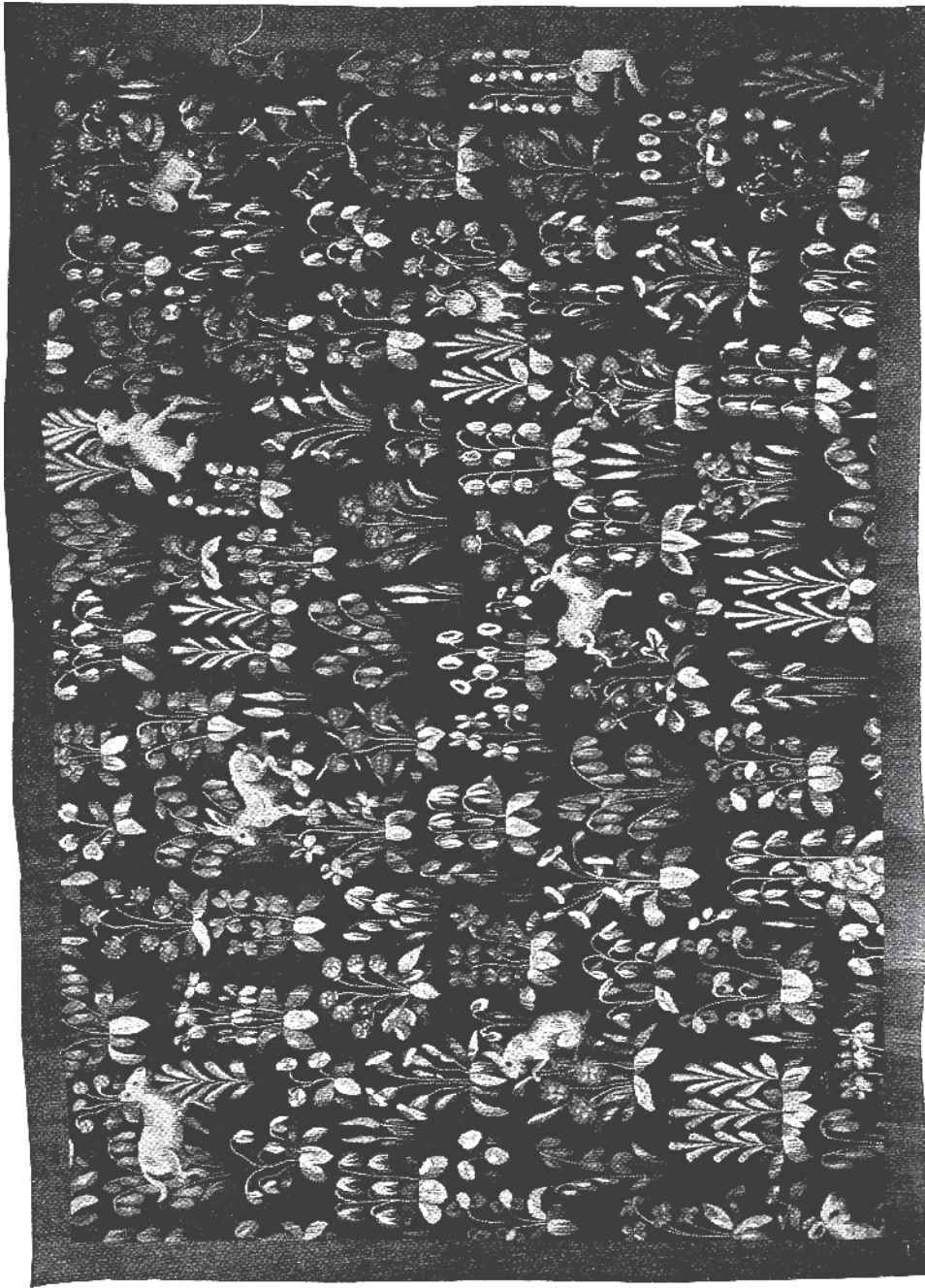
There is, for instance, the tapestry industry in which Italy, France, Flanders, and Spain have in all centuries taken great interest. Recently, the *London Daily Telegraph* stated that Lord Bute has been endeavoring to revive tapestry weaving in Scotland. He has had fine buildings erected and designs for the weavers provided by a Scottish painter. A

great panel measuring $32\frac{1}{2}$ by $13\frac{1}{2}$ feet, and representing a Highland hunting scene, has been completed and is said to be the largest piece of tapestry yet produced in Scotland. This completion of the first of a contemplated series of panels has relation to a scheme under consideration by the British State authorities whereby tapestry weaving would be taught to a small, selected group of disabled men, providing orders could be secured. Arrangements are said to be now practically completed, the men are selected, the looms are ready, and instruction will be given by experts at the London County Council School of Arts and Crafts.

What is being done in Great Britain, and probably in France, could also be done in the United States. This is a piece of work in which the Needle and Bobbin Club could take the initiative. There are two or three commercial tapestry industries already established here, but the individual craftsman needs to be encouraged to do really personal work, each piece carefully designed for a special place and dyed and woven with loving care. The illustration that accompanies this article shows a Mille Fleurs tapestry from the New York studio of Manuel Gengoult, who dyes his wools, designs tapestries and needlepoint, and teaches both these beautiful arts.

The weaving of rugs, curtains, and draperies of all kinds by hand can become an important feature of the textile industry. The small looms found in the homes of French and Italian villagers produce some of the most expensive brocades that we import. The weaver is generally an old man, sometimes an old woman, but always an expert, and work is never lacking for the little loom. These people are happy until they die—always plying their trade. People are unhappy because they are idle and dependent; by giving them occupation, dissatisfaction will disappear. Similarly, hand-made tweeds are produced all over Scotland in the cottages by the elderly people, and this does not in any way interfere with the great mills run by machinery all over the British Isles. The mills copy the hand-made fabrics and sell them cheaper to the general public, but the hand-made fabrics continue to hold a special place in the textile world.

The beautiful art of embroidery is comparatively unknown in this country. There is unlimited opportunity for decoration of all types and joy in the designing and making of the embroideries. Our churches would be beautified by tapestries and embroideries, and the children, see-



MILLE FLEURS TAPESTRY. BY MANUEL GENGOULT

ing that these arts are appreciated, would wish to learn them and gradually there would be developed the much talked of "artistic industries"; thrift would flourish, as all idle fingers would then be busy filling our land with wanted, beautiful hand-made textiles.

Last January, the Needle and Bobbin Club did a valuable service to designers by holding an exhibition of beautiful antique fabrics, in the galleries of the Art Alliance of America, during the period of the third exhibit of American hand-decorated textiles. The graceful designs and glowing colors of these old-time weaves were rich in cultural influence and inspiration.

A step further might be taken by coöperating systematically with the Art Alliance of America in its development of the artistic industries among the foreign population. The very successful exhibition of Foreign Handicraft held by the Art Alliance of America in its galleries, last June, included work by nineteen nationalities, many of them plying their craft in the galleries. This demonstrated effectively that we have craftsmen in this country capable of doing excellent work if the proper encouragement is given. Plans are now under way whereby orders can be placed through the Art Alliance for execution by these craftsmen in their own homes, the designs being carefully supervised by an expert who will also see to it that the craftsmanship is of the highest character.