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FIG. I

TITLE-PAGE TO VALLET'S LE JARDIN DU ROY. PARIS, 1608. IN THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART.

EMBROIDERY AND BOTANY

by

MARGARET HARRINGTON DANIELS

“And because the breath of flowers is far sweeter in the air (where it comes and goes, like the warbling of music) than in the hand, therefore nothing is more fit for that delight than to know what be the flowers and plants that do best perfume the air.”

THE combined efforts of a king's gardener and a king's embroiderer produced a delightful flower book in 1608 called *Le Jardin Du Roy*. Behind its publication there is a curious story of the impetus given by embroidery to the development of botany and gardening in France.

Along the streets of many European cities grow locust trees which Linneaus named *Robinia pseudacacia* or, “Robinia” in honour of a family of botanists who lived in Paris in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Jean Robin (1550-1629) was the younger and more celebrated of two brothers who devoted themselves to the cultivation of plants. About 1585 he was made *arboriste* and *simpliciste* to the King (Henry III). Botanical gardens had already been established in Padua, Bologna, and Pisa, and Richer de Belleval had started one in Montpellier when, in 1597, the Faculté de Médecine directed Robin to organize a similar one in Paris. In the catalogue he made for them a few years later Robin listed more than 1,300 native and foreign plants that he had brought together.¹ His son, Vespasien (1579-1662), journeyed to Spain and the African coast for rare plants, and it was he who brought from North America the locust or false acacia, the only one of our trees that has been extensively cultivated in Europe.

¹ Catalogue stirpium tam indigenarum quam exoticarum quae Lutetiae coluntur. Paris, 1601.



FIG. 2

PORTRAIT OF PIERRE VALLET. IN LE JARDIN DU ROY.



FIG. 3

PORTRAIT OF JEAN ROBIN. IN LE JARDIN DU ROY.

While the Robins travelled and laboured to provide study material for medical students, as well as herbs and simples for the poor, Pierre Vallet (c. 1575-[?]), designer and engraver, attached to the royal household as "Brodeur ordinaire du Roy" created designs to be worked in coloured silks and wool, silver and gold, by the ladies of the court. Embroidery came into general use in France under Catherine de Medicis. In convents, at the court, in chateaux, and ateliers, the borrowed patterns of the Italian Renaissance took on a French flavour and were executed by needles as expert as the Italian. When Henry IV settled the court in Paris, embroidery had become "une véritable passion." Natural representations of flowers instead of the conventional forms were demanded for brocades, silks, and embroidery. Vallet turned to his friend, Robin, for inspiration and help. The King gave his enthusiastic and generous support to their plan to grow in the garden between the Louvre and St. Germain l'Auxerrois native and exotic plants to be used as motifs for embroidery. So it came about that tropical blooms flourished far away from home under royal patronage in Paris.

In order to bring their garden to the designers and botanists who were unable to come to it, Robin and Vallet made a selection of their plants for publication. Vallet drew and etched them on seventy-five plates to which were added a title-page, a dedication to the Queen (Marie de Medicis) dated 30 November 1608, and several pages of letter-press. Robin tells in Latin of his travels and gives short descriptions of several of the plants and bulbs which his son brought home from a trip to Spain and Guinea in 1603. The exchange of compliments between the collaborators, the sonnets, quatrains, and anagrams which laud their abilities are written in the contemporary "style alambiqué," the combination of over-refinement and erudition compounded of high-sounding phrases, classical references, and mythology, and a generous sprinkling of Greek. The gardens, compared to the "parterres of Hesperides" and the "orchards of Alcinoüs," are grown under the "dome of the Queen's glory," and the Queen herself is eulogized by "la fleur de toutes les Roynes . . . divine fleur de Florence, qui, unie avec les lys de France par arrest du Ciel a produit des fleurons de paix et de béatitude."

Between the figures of Ceres and Pomona surmounting the tympanum of the architectural border on the title-page (Fig. I.) is the crown of France above the monogram of the King and Queen. On the right is the figure of Mathieu Lobel, doctor and botanist of King James I of England, and on the left, that of Charles de L'Écluse (Clusius), the



FIG. 4

ETCHING BY VALLET. IN LE JARDIN DU ROY.



FIG. 5

ETCHING BY VALLET. IN LE JARDIN DU ROY.

Arras botanist who taught at the medical school in Montpellier, travelled and studied in Spain, in England, and Germany, directed the gardens of Maximilian II at Vienna, and ended his career as professor of botany at the University of Leyden. Tranchau (loc. cit.) has translated the four lines of Latin between the columns:

“C'est ici un perpétuel printemps;
Ce sont des fleurs dont rien ne flétrira les fraîches
et variées couleurs. Ici Flore a un ravissant jardin
qui charme les regards des dieux et des déesses.”

Vallet was a very able draughtsman who made charming book illustrations, plates of mythological and classical subjects, and an engraved plan of Paris after François Quesnel. His portraits of himself (Fig. 2) and Robin (Fig. 3) are undoubtedly excellent likenesses. Tranchau translates the Latin under his portrait as “Il n'a qu'a vouloir, et tous ceux qui s'adonnent aux arts protégés de Minerve, il les surpasse par l'habilité de la main et par le génie,” and the distich under Robin's, “Toutes les espèces de plantes que produit le jardin des Hespérides et le monde entier, cet homme les connaît mieux que nul autre.” Another edition of the book appeared in 1623 with the title changed to read Louis XIII instead of Henri IV, another in 1638, and still another in 1650 with the title “Hortus Regius” It is only in the first edition, however, that Robin's portrait appears and the Latin text about his travels.

There were important developments in the art of gardening under Henry IV due, in a large measure, to the king's keen interest in his gardens at St. Germain-en-Laye, Fontainebleau, at Monceaux, and Blois. Olivier de Serres' *Théâtre D'Agriculture*, published in 1600, exerted tremendous influence upon agriculture in France. In the sixth chapter devoted to gardening De Serres lists the herbs and flowering plants to be used for the borders and beds of the parterres which became an outstanding feature of the French garden. Du Pérac, architect at Fontainebleau, and the King's own gardener, Claude Mollet, were great exponents of the parterre and they laid them out as a single, or integral, design divided by wide paths. As in embroidery, the geometric patterns for the flower beds changed to the undulating curves of arabesques which were given the name of “compartiments de broderie.” For the variety of low plants that was needed, designers of the parterre could turn to the garden of Robin and Vallet where they might see how high wall-flowers would

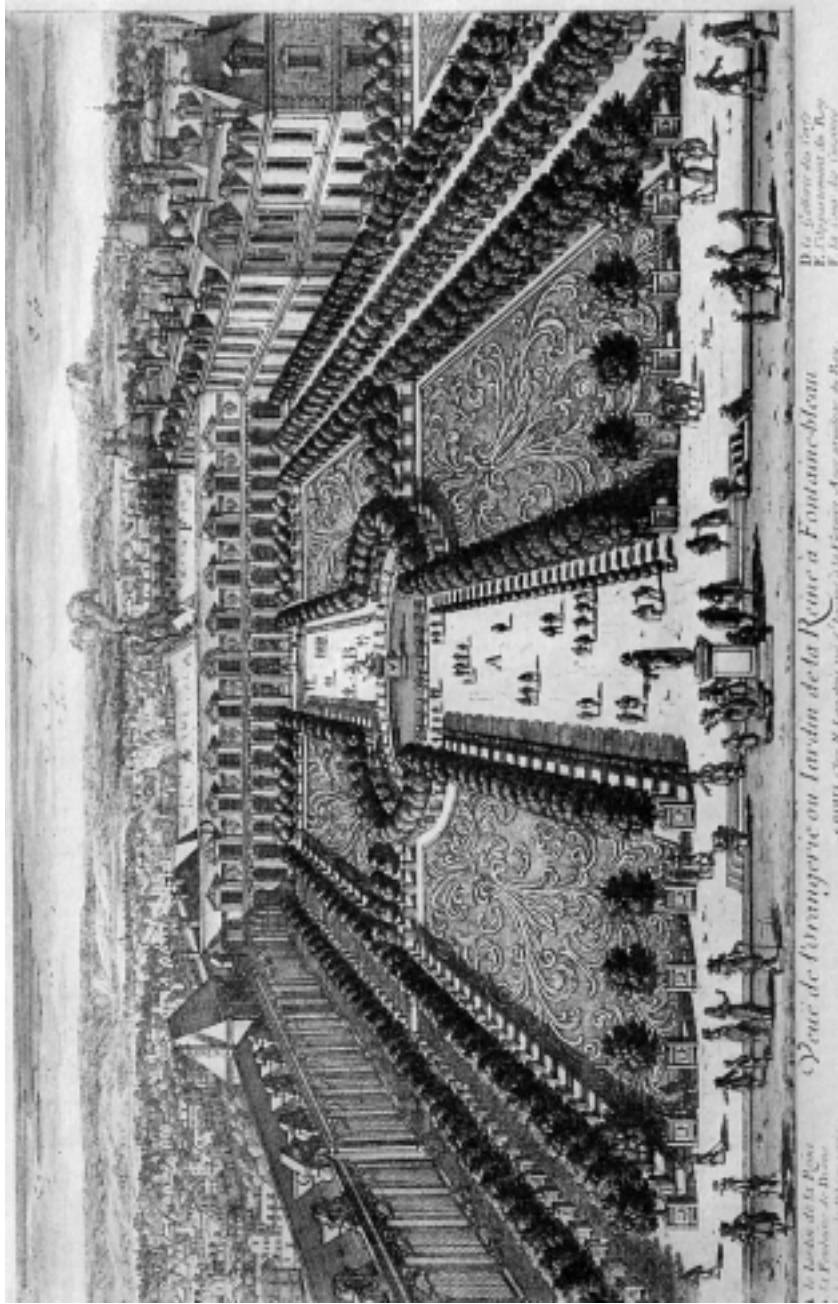


FIG. 6

THE PARTERRE AT FONTAINEBLEAU ALTERED AND ENLARGED BY HENRY IV AND CONVERTED INTO AN ORANGERY BY LOUIS XIV. FROM AN ENGRAVING BY PERELLE.

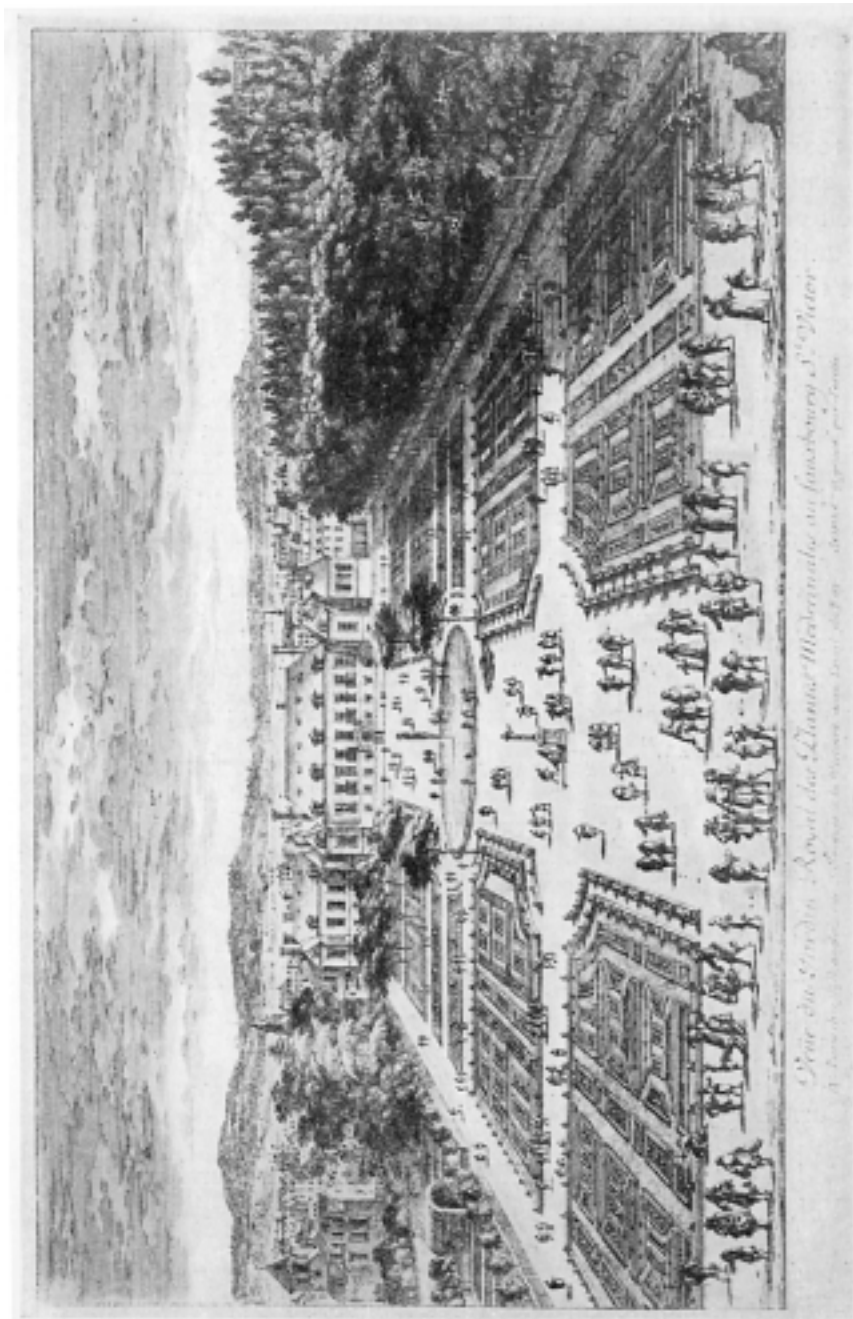


FIG. 7
VIEW OF THE PRESENT JARDIN DES PLANTES DURING TIME OF LOUIS XIV. FROM AN ENGRAVING
BY PERELLE.

grow, how lavender, thyme, mint, and marjoram combined for edging beds filled with violets, pinks, lilies-of-the-valley, the tuberose from Languedoc, and the unfamiliar, more exotic flowers that Robin popularized in France.

Botany took long strides in the seventeenth century. Tournefort, the French botanist, examined more than 10,000 plants in order to make his classification of trees and herbs which was the basis of botany instruction in France until Linnaeus published his system in 1734. Of greater significance at this moment, however, is the foundation of the present Jardin Des Plantes, for its origin was inspired by Robin's garden. In 1626, Guy de la Brosse and Hérouard, physicians to the royal household, were so impressed by what Robin had accomplished they petitioned the King to take over Robin's garden as the nucleus of a botanical garden to be established and maintained by the Crown. The Faculté de Médecine considered the proposition an assumption of their prerogatives. Against their violent objections to a royal garden of medicinal herbs, the King, by letters patent dated May 1635, assumed control over a house and twenty-four "arpents" of land in the Place Maubert, Faubourg St. Victor which La Brosse had selected as the site of the new "Jardin Royal." Jean Robin had died, but Vespasien transferred his plants and became one of the instructors under La Brosse who was the director. Among the trees he planted the "Robinia."

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* The writer is indebted to H. A. Elsberg, Esq., for this reference.



EMBROIDERED ALTARFRONTAL, ITALIAN, SEVENTEENTH CENTURY, BY COURTESY OF
M. DIKRAN G. KELEKIAN.

AN ADORATION OF THE MAGI IN EMBROIDERY

by

PHYLLIS ACKERMAN

WHILE the Adoration of the Magi depicted in this embroidery follows the traditional formula in the central episode, added unto that are a wealth and variety of imaginative detail. In the center sits Mary, holding out her Son, a charming and lively baby who resembles the well rounded, graceful putti, popular at this time. Joseph, standing behind the Virgin, is the traditional figure established some two centuries earlier. Behind Joseph are the ox and the ass, unusually well rendered. They meant, of course, that the humblest of God's creatures acknowledged the new-born King, but they also symbolized the Old Law and the New, coming to accord, the Hebrews and the Gentiles. That the ox should be associated with the peoples of the Ancient East is obvious. Bulls had been a central feature of the cult in most of the Ancient Eastern civilizations. The choice of the ass, however, is ambiguous.

The Magi are the Three Kings, rather than the simple three wise men of the earlier version, potentates of dazzling wealth and luxury. Melchior, the eldest, follows the pseudo-Bede's description, an elderly man with flowing beard, who kneels before his Lady, pouring coins into a carpet. But Caspar, the King of middle years, instead of being the ruddy, beardless man of the mediæval account, is also bearded, doubtless in accordance with prevailing fashion among middle-aged men of the upper classes. Balthazzar again follows the pseudo-Bede's conception in that he is young and a negro. The three men thus represent not only the Three Ages of Man but also the Three Races of the Earth, the New Testament parallel of Ham, Shem, and Japheth.

Caspar has removed his crown and kneels in homage. Balthazzar turns to take from a kneeling page a golden vase that he will offer. On either side across the foreground stretch the trains of the Kings' attendants. On

the left is a page holding a handsome falcon. Carrying a falcon had been for centuries an implicit insignia of nobility, just as, in the earliest historic and even prehistoric Eastern cultures birds of this family had been the emblem of the King.

Behind this page is a group of three courtiers in conversation, of whom the most vivacious holds out, conspicuously, an apple, apparently the subject of their discussion. That this is merely an accidental detail is improbable. It is too clearly emphasized and too relevant. For the apple was not only a symbol of the Fall of Man but as such indicated also the Redemption, and the homage of the Three Kings means humanity's acceptance of their Redeemer.

The parallelism of the Old Testament and the New, implicit in the identification of the Three Magi with the Sons of Noah, which had been such a major doctrine in the Middle Ages, is further developed in some small episodes on the left. On a steep ramp in the upper left corner, formed by broken ruins in the romantic taste of the time, but treated as a hillside, a shepherd guards his flock. So Moses watched his sheep when he saw the Burning Bush, and Moses and the Burning Bush was a presage of the Nativity. Just below, a man and woman carrying fagots lead a child. So Isaac was led to sacrifice, and Isaac led to the sacrifice meant the Carrying of the Cross. These two episodes, which are presented as genre scenes, might merely be enlivening illustrative details without any significance, but that they are allusive is established by the next little scene below. A coiled serpent appears before a man hammering a transverse into a stock of wood. The presentation of the serpent is such that it immediately suggests the Serpent of Brass, and the wood on which the man is working is put together like the staff on which the Serpent of Brass was coiled for display. But the Serpent of Brass meant the Crucifixion, and the making of the staff implies the Building of the Cross. Here, then, in these three scenes is the Incarnation and the Passion in summary presentation. Moreover, the theme is epitomized by the majestic stag that paces out from under the arch of the ruins, for the stag is Christ come to rid the world of sin, just as the stag (according to the old Bestiaries) devours snakes.

To the right of the ruins a little group of travellers, depicted to suggest the weariness of a long trek, find their further progress barred by the sea. A man driving a laden horse and pon plods on, but his companions and their camels stop and look across the waste of waters, while their leader

turns to speak to them. Even so the wandering Children of Israel came to the Red Sea, and the Exodus and the sufferings it entailed were symbolic of humanity lost in the wilderness of error and sin before the advent of the Son of God.

Furthermore, this Flight of the Children of Israel is balanced by a reference in the center of the composition to its specific New Testament parallel, the Flight into Egypt. Three men, the leader mounted, stop to speak to a laborer reaping grain. When the Holy Family was fleeing into Egypt they met a laborer sowing wheat. The little Jesus took a handful of grains and scattered them. Immediately the wheat sprouted, grew, and matured. When the soldiers of Herod came in pursuit, the laborer was reaping this grain. They asked him if he had seen a family with a child and he replied: "Yes, when I was sowing this grain." Thus they were diverted from their quest and the Child was spared.

The significance of a very picturesque caravan approaching to the right of this is not clear; yet it at once suggests the merchants to whom Joseph was sold, and Joseph Sold by His Brethren meant the Betrayal. The second caravan winding down a hill to the right seems to be simply a continuation of the Magi's train.

All these episodes are presented as actual happenings of the day, with, however, as much emphasis as possible on the Oriental features, for the development of Asiatic trade and world exploration had stimulated throughout Europe a great enthusiasm for all things Eastern. This is reflected, too, in the central episode of the Adoration of the Magi in two most interesting details. The exquisitely accurate minute patterning of Melchior's tunic is clearly adapted, directly or indirectly, from a Persian textile; and the carpet spread to receive his gift of coins must be intended to represent an Oriental rug, strongly suggesting a so-called "Polonaise."

Four animal episodes are also relevant to the central theme of Christ's mission on earth, and two are of very ancient origin. On the left is a goat nibbling a plant. The capridae eating of the Plant or Tree of Life were from the most remote ages, a symbol of the invigorating power of the gods, and the Byzantines took this symbol from their neighbors to the east, reinterpreted it to Christian ends, and transmitted it to Europe. That the figure of the goat is not an insignificant detail is shown by the fact that it is balanced by a second motive that has the same history, a stag going to drink, another ancient representation of the transmission of divine power which had been appropriated by Byzantium.

The other two animal episodes are of relatively more recent derivation, illustrating the kind of animal fables told at least as early as the Classical period in the East, and often used in Europe as illustrations in Christian sermons. On the left are hounds chasing a fox, on the right, a fox stealing grapes. Neither has any direct relation to the Oriental stories made familiar by Aesop and his later imitators and translators, but obviously they exemplify sin among the animals. For the Christian they would indicate the enmity among the beasts that resulted from the Fall and the consequent demoralization of the Garden of Paradise. Thus these animal episodes illustrate in this kingdom the Fall and the Redemption.

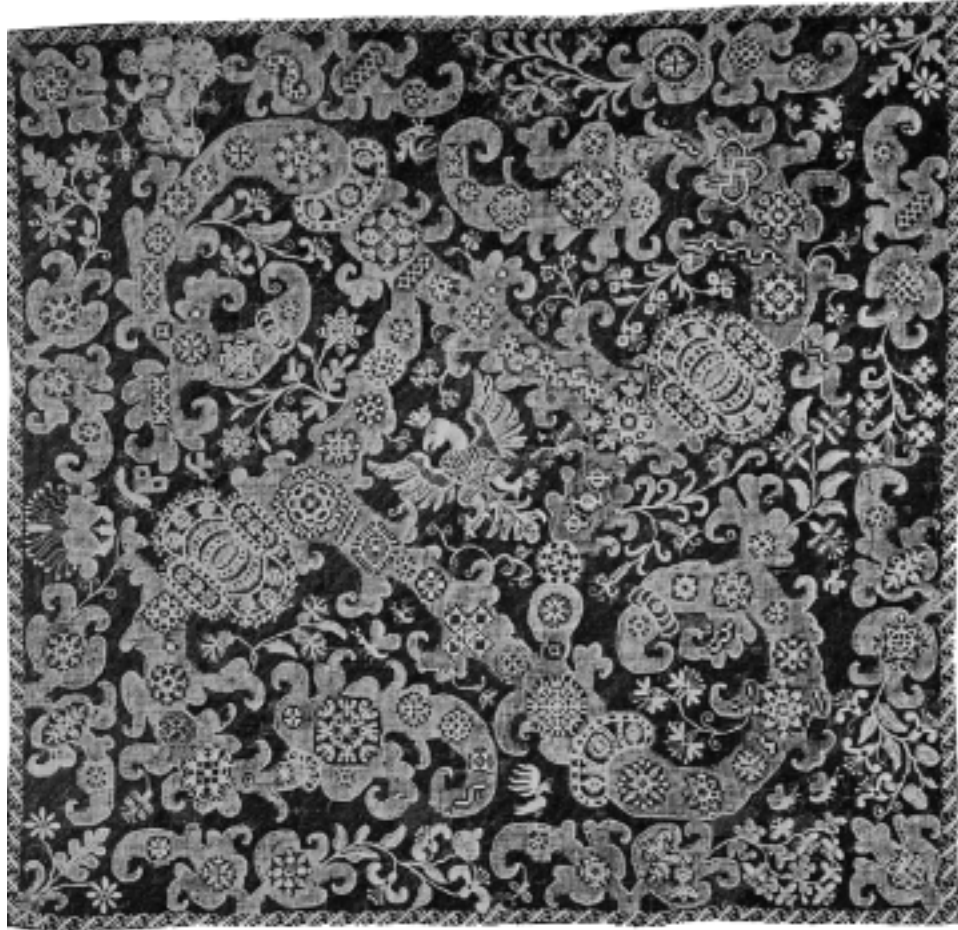
Finally, the same theme is shown in Heaven. On either side are falling angels, struggling in vain through the clouds. In the center is God the Father in glory, surrounded by the cherubim and seraphim and the choir of angels, accompanied by an angelic orchestra of lutes, viols, an organ, harps, and trumpets.

Thus this Adoration of the Magi is a great symphonic demonstration of the mission of Christ as the Redeemer, and in its presentation every race, age, and class of man and every species of animal has been represented: the fishes under the sea and even the shell-fish; the quadrupeds and the birds of the air. For the whole universe suffered in the Fall, and all rejoiced in the Redeemer.

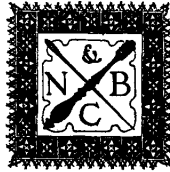
In contriving the multiple details, some of which are so unusual, of this great Christian exposition, the designer was probably not following his own religious and artistic fancy. Probably he was illustrating a sermon or one of those rhetorical essays in picturesque Christian exegesis, so popular in the late Renaissance. Many of the episodes seem to be comments on the significance of the Epiphany, and the ensemble presents a popular but eloquent summary of the central theory of Christian ethical doctrine. It is a brilliant discourse in embroidery, preached to a pious but fashionable audience, interested in the tastes and even fads of the moment, but genuinely moved in their devotions.



DETAIL OF ADORATION PLATE



CENTER PANEL IN A COVER OF EMBROIDERED NETTING FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE LATE MRS. ANNA BLAKESLEY BLISS. THE COVER MEASURES 41 INCHES. THIS PANEL IS 20 INCHES.



CLUB NOTES

December the tenth, 1935. The first meeting of the winter was held at the residence of Mrs. Augustus Paine at 39 East 69th Street. The speaker of the afternoon was Mr. Tassilo Adam, former Ethnologist of the Netherlands East Indies Government, who made an address on the Batik Industry of Java. Mr. Adam, whose long residence in Java enabled him to speak with authority, illustrated his lecture with a remarkable series of moving pictures showing the life of the people and their native crafts. Mr. Adam's official life brought him in close contact with court life, and the Sultan's interest in his work made it possible for him to obtain unusual privileges, among which was permission to film the court dancers in their interesting Batik costumes especially designed for the household of the Sultan.

At the close of the lecture there was a program of Javanese and Hindu dances by Lilo Simarito, Mr. Adam's daughter who was born in Java, and her younger sister. Lilo Simarito is an exquisite exponent of the art of Oriental dancing; she was trained by the finest of the Javanese teachers from whom she has acquired an exceptionally fine technique which with her natural charm enhanced by beautiful costumes, creates a fascinating exotic atmosphere.

An added note of interest, in this afternoon long to be remembered, was the collection of rare Batiks, assembled by Mr. Adam, which were displayed in an adjoining room, and the Club is grateful to Mrs. Paine for her cordial cooperation in entertaining the Club.

January the twenty-second, 1936. On this date Mrs. Gates W. McGarrah invited the members of the Club to meet at her apartment, 1 East 72nd Street, to view an exhibit of the lace collection of the late Mrs. Anna Blakesley Bliss, one of the Charter Members of the Club, who bequeathed her collection to Miss Frances Morris. The large drawing-room overlooking the winter landscape of Central Park made an admirable setting for the lace as there was ample light on every side. The laces that represented beautiful examples of the lace-makers' art from the seventeenth century to the present day made a distinguished exhibit, and the large attendance bespoke the interest that is still maintained in this exquisite fabric that is, one may well say, a lost art, but expressed also the Club's appreciation of Mrs. McGarrah's hospitality in entertaining its members.

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