



Lent by George Blumenthal, Esq.

"Mercury and Herse." Renaissance Tapestry

RENAISSANCE TAPESTRIES

ILLUSTRATED BY EXAMPLES IN THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

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THE most famous tapestries in the world are the *Acts of the Apostles* set at the Vatican, designed by Raphael for Pope Leo X, and woven in Brussels by Pieter Van Aelst. The most famous tapestry cartoons in the world are those from which the *Acts of the Apostles* tapestries were woven, cartoons formerly at Hampton Court, brought to England from Genoa in 1623 for use at the newly-founded Mortlake tapestry works, and since some years on exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in South Kensington. Of the tapestries, the Metropolitan Museum has in the Photograph room of the Library a set of large and remarkable photographs, especially made for the late J. Pierpont Morgan and by him presented to the Museum. Of the cartoons, the Museum has excellent illustrations in Müntz's folio volume entitled *Les Tapisseries de Raphael au Vatican*, published in Paris in 1897.

Though the Museum has no *Acts of the Apostles* tapestries, either of the sixteenth century or later, it has two tapestries that illustrate brilliantly their style and weave—the two *Mercury and Herse* panels, lent by Mr. George Blumenthal, and hanging in the main entrance hall of the Museum. Of these two tapestries it is difficult to speak too highly.

They represent the acme of accomplishment in tapestry weaving of the period. The borders, richly grounded in gold of basket weave, are unsurpassed. The robes brocaded in gold are marvellous beyond description. No wonder that the city of Brussels, the mark of which still remains in one of the bottom selvages, was proud of the man who made them, the famous Willem Van Pannemaker, whose monogram appears in threads of gold in the lower part of the right selvaige of both tapestries.

These tapestries represent in Renaissance work what the Mazarin tapestry represents in Gothic work, the extraordinary results that can be obtained by employing gold and silver thread generously in addition to silk and the basic wool. In the possession of the Duchess of Denia of Spain there is a complete *Mercury and Herse* set, eight tapestries picturing the courtship, marriage and separation of *Mercury and Herse*. Of these, two, the *Nuptial Chamber* and the *Separation*, are duplicates of those belonging to Mr. Blumenthal. The illustration shows the *Separation*.

On the left of the huge tapestry (14 feet 5 inches by 24 feet) is Aglauros, sister of Herse, being changed to stone by Mercury before the eyes of her horrified father Cecrops. The penalty was

inflicted because Aglauros through jealousy refused to admit Mercury to his wife. On the right of the *Separation*, Mercury having accomplished his revenge is seen soaring up over the palace, back to Olympus, while the courtiers and attendants follow his flight with awe-stricken faces, and Cecrops in the foreground lets fall his sceptre. At first puzzling, but ultimately pleasing, is this combination of two separate scenes in one panel without dividing line or column. It suggests at once the bold methods of presentation of tapestries of a much earlier style and period.

The borders of both tapestries merit special attention. They are compartment borders of the style introduced by the side borders of the Vatican *Acts of the Apostles*. But they are much more splendid, for the ten Vatican tapestries being woven for definite spaces in the Sistine Chapel, were partially framed by the architecture, and have only seven side borders instead of the full complement of twenty, while the bottom borders are in a totally different and far less interesting style, i. e., ineffective imitations of bas-relief picturing scenes in the life of Leo X before he became Pope. The side and bottom borders of these *Mercury and Herse* tapestries are unsurpassed by any.

Another famous series of Renaissance tapestries was the *Story of Scipio*, in 22 pieces, designed by Raphael's famous pupil, Giulio Romano. Of the original color sketches, 15 were discovered in the

Cabinet of Designs at the Louvre by M. Jean Guiffrey, and by Colonel d'Astier whose book *La Belle Tapisserie du Roy*, to be found in the Museum Library, describes and amply illustrates the Scipio tapestries of the Renaissance and after. One of the set of seven in the Royal Spanish Collection, purchased by Mary of Hungary and, on her death in 1558, bequeathed by her to her brother, the Emperor Charles V, pictures the *Interview of Scipio and Hannibal*. The *Roman Triumph* in the Coles collection belonging to the Museum, and illustrated herewith, is similar in style to these Scipio tapestries, and evidently inspired by them, though probably picturing the triumph of another great warrior than Scipio.

Only five feet by seven, but splendid examples of the style of ornament called Grottesque (underground)—because copied and adapted by Raphael and his pupils from the Golden House of Nero, of the excavations of which they had a monopoly—are the two framed and glass-covered tapestries skied at the south end of the east wall of the main hall of the Decorative Arts Wing, lent by Mr. George Blumenthal, formerly in the Garland collection that was sold in 1909, and before that in the collection of Baron Rothschild and illustrated (one of them) on page 222 of Müntz's *La Tapisserie*, published at Paris in 1881. The historical interest of these two Grottesques is increased by the fact that they are said to have been made for the bed



“Roman Colosseum.” Late Renaissance Tapestry



Presented by J. Pierpont Morgan, Esq.

Late German Renaissance Tapestry

of Margaret of Parma, natural daughter of the Emperor Charles V, and Regent of the Netherlands from 1559 to 1567. It will be remembered that the tapestry-weaving Netherlands had more than their share of petticoat government in the sixteenth century, Charles V.'s aunt, Margaret of Austria, having been Regent from 1507 to 1530, and his sister, Mary of Hungary, from 1530 to 1555. Perhaps this was the cause of the unusual prosperity of the Netherlands at that time.

The coloration of the two tapestries is exquisite, rich reds, with blues and yellows greyed on the loom and after to indescribable delicacy of tone, with gold artfully interwoven and much silk. The borders are alike and narrow, with rinceaux, masques, swans and vases on a pale-blue ground. The panels balance each other though brilliantly different in design. In both masses of rich and heavy reds above and below, with the field between divided symmetrically between pale yellow and pale blue. In each tapestry a man and a woman typifying peace and prosperity, command the attention; but in one tapestry they are near the ends of the field, while in the other they are in the centre, separated only by an open cornucopia filled with fruit and flowers. Over the middle of both tapestries is an arbor. The rest of the space is filled with the most fascinating birds and fowls—grouse, peacocks, larks, pheasants, flamingoes, doves, macaws, and

others, the most luxuriant flowers and the most luscious fruits; and in the lower part of one tapestry, balancing each other on the red ground, a sheep and a goat; in the other tapestry, a rabbit and a cat with heads sticking out of holes. Whoever wishes a clear illustration of what Grotesque ornament is, may be referred to these two tapestries.

Of "verdure" tapestries, there are three principal types—Gothic, Renaissance and Later. Most of the Gothics belong to the exquisite mille fleur type illustrated so splendidly by the *Lady with the Unicorn* set at the Cluny Museum. Most of the Later verdures are of the Oudenarde seventeenth and eighteenth century type, copied at Aubusson and elsewhere in real tapestry, and nowadays also in Jacquard tapestries. More interesting than the Later verdures, though undoubtedly less interesting than the Gothic ones, are the Renaissance "large leaf" verdures of the Enghien type, often with birds and animals, and frequently with figures. The Metropolitan has two of these, both fragments. The later the date, the weaker and more faded the blues are apt to be.

The only German tapestries in the Museum are a *Story of Christ*, in six small and crude, but not unpleasing, panels given by the late J. Pierpont Morgan. All are dated, two 1592, two 1595, one 1598, one 1600. All are 39 inches by 30 inches
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"Roman Triumph." Renaissance Tapestry

Remus and their wolf nurse, is that of the Colossus from which the Colosseum got its name. The games inside the Colosseum are represented in full swing and enough spectators occupy the circular rows of seats to give the suggestion of a crowd. But the Colosseum building is pictured incorrectly, evidently from an inaccurate drawing or engraving of the period. The border though Baroque rather than Renaissance is full of life—birds above and fish below, with animals of field and forest on each side. The tapestry is signed in the bottom selvage with the Brussels mark and in the right selvage with the monogram of W.S., probably Willem Segers.

Another tapestry hanging like the *Colosseum* in the Baroque room of the Decorative Arts Wing, also shows strongly the influence of a period earlier than the weave. This is a Gobelin copy without border, made in the time of Louis XIV, of one of the famous Renaissance set after Van Orley, the Hunts of Maximilian also called in France the Belles Chasses de Guise.

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wide, all are enriched with gold and silver, and all are topped with a white panel bearing a description in German of the scene pictured, as well as a reference to the proper book and chapter of the New Testament. All are signed with the monograms of both A.R. and I.C.M., the latter upside down in the example illustrated, which bears the inscription, *Christus wusch vorm letzten Abendmal den Jüngern ire Füsse, Johann XIII* (Before the Last Supper, Christ washed the feet of the Apostles, John XIII). This, like two others of the set, is after Albrecht Dürer's woodcuts of the *Small Passion*.

Interesting in subject and plan, and with particularly interesting borders is the late Renaissance *Roman Colosseum* of the Coles collection. But the coloration is bad, the yellows being distinctly unpleasing. The mounted figure in the foreground is the Emperor Titus, who is credited with the construction of the Colosseum. The huge foot in the lower right corner, the pedestal of which shows in low relief the infant twins Romulus and