



PLATE I

SWISS GENEALOGICAL PANEL. WOOL EMBROIDERY OF THE EARLY 17TH CENTURY.  
FRENCH & CO., NEW YORK.

A SWISS GENEALOGICAL EMBROIDERY  
OF THE EARLY 17TH CENTURY

*By*

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WHILE Switzerland played a leading part among the German-speaking countries in the field of tapestry weaving during the 15th century, she was in the 16th and 17th centuries supreme as a center of embroidery. There especially two kinds of embroideries were cultivated: white linen embroideries, which by their clear design and delicately drawn outlines frequently attained the effect of embroidered woodcuts, and the wool embroideries, which thanks to their technical means, their bright colors, their plastic effects, perspective and composition were able to enter into successful competition with the art of painting.

A most important and interesting example of the latter kind of needlework, belonging to the early 17th century, has recently come to light in America, and has been acquired by French & Co., in New York. It is the rare specimen of a genealogical panel, remarkable for its highly artistic value as well as for its technical and iconographical interest. (Plate I.)<sup>1</sup>

The piece measures a little over five feet square, and the fact that all the representations are running in one direction only points to its being used for a wall hanging and not for a table-cloth. It is worked on a dark blue woolen fabric in stemstitch and laid work with silk and wool threads.

Between a pattern of well-drawn scrolling tendrils with flowers and fruit, are arranged around a central medallion twelve smaller roundels, portraying Hans Morell and his family, each person engaged in an occupation peculiar to him, with small scrolls bearing the names.

The central medallion shows the head of the family, "Hanns Morell" with his wife, "Barbara Osseinrotin," both with their coats-of-arms below them. They are seated at a table, covered with a lace-bordered cloth and set with plates and goblets. The youngest children are playing around them; a baby lies in a cradle. The embroidered dates, "1567," "1601," appear in the background.

<sup>1</sup> *The Connoisseur*, 1935, p. 352.

The twelve smaller medallions seem to be devoted to the pictures of the children grown to maturity. In the roundel at the upper left corner appear "Madlene Morellin" and her husband, "Ludwig Huerlin." This couple are also seated at a table, richly furnished with different plates and dishes, with a candle standing upon it. The striped table-cloth is adorned with an embroidered border. A maid servant is serving the meal. At a smaller table in the foreground are six children, two of them involved in a fierce struggle. A nurse is entering with the two smaller children. In the second roundel are represented "Barbara Morellin" and "Daniell Labartt." They are walking through the country, richly dressed, accompanied by their three children. The third medallion shows "Maria Morellin" in her home with a pillow, on which she is making lace. Her husband, "Antoni Olion," enters the room, lifting his hat. On the next picture, "Hans Jacob Morell" follows with his wife, "Marta Hackin," riding on horseback. Below, "Ursula Morellin," is depicted coming out of the door with her daughter, to welcome her husband, "Hans Berg Schaland." A roped package on the ground indicates his return from a journey. In the background a second child is to be seen, riding on a hobby-horse. In the sixth medallion, "Luigia Morellin" works at an embroidery frame. Her visitor with sword and spurs seems to be a soldier. "Christina Morellin," in the right lower corner, is busy in her richly furnished kitchen, just tasting a dish prepared by herself. Another couple, "Catrina Morellin" and "Helias Fels," are shown on a walk through the country. Whereas, "Andreas Morell," who seems to have been a scientist or a man of letters, is in his study, writing at his desk. "Helena Morell" is drawing wine from a cask in a wine cellar. "Efrasina Morellin" is gathering pears, which a boy is plucking from a tree. And "Johannes Morell" is riding proudly on horseback. Rendered with marvelous freedom in movements and attitudes are five musicians, who fill up the spaces between the upper roundels.

All the scenes are full of originality and animation, the figures drawn from nature in their working and moving, surrounded by every kind of naturalistic accessory. Richly adorned and varied are the stylish costumes, and all the representations lead us in the midst of the every-day life of prosperous and distinguished Swiss citizens, noble patricians, who were the principal bearers of culture in Swiss towns.

In fact, the head of the family, Hans Morell, is a man of some importance. He is descended from a respectable Bernese family, now extinct. Existing documents show that he received his coat-of-arms with



CENTRAL MEDALLION OF SWISS GENEALOGICAL PANEL (PLATE I) SHOWING  
HANNS MORELL WITH HIS WIFE, BARBARA OSSEINROTIN.

a warrant from King Ferdinand I, in the year 1555.<sup>2</sup> This armorial shield, party or and white, with three Negroes' heads, two and one, is represented in the central medallion on the left and is probably connected with his name, "More(II)."

We also know that Hans Jacob Morell, the grandson of Hans Morell, was an esteemed citizen of Berne and an "administrateur de la caisse du sel." He died 1663.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps we can identify him with the rider on horseback in the roundel of the right top corner.

Another descendant of the family, Andreas Morell, was a famous numismatist, who was called to Paris by Louis XIV as a director of the "Royal cabinet des monnaies." In this capacity his doings seem to have been open to criticism, for he was imprisoned in 1687, but later on freed by the government of Berne and appointed keeper of the collections of the Count of Schwarzenbourg in Arnstett. As he only died in 1703, he cannot possibly be represented on the embroidery.<sup>4</sup> But it seems probable that his father, Andreas Morell, seen here in his study, may have also been a scientist.

Besides these dates I was able to find out some notes about the sons-in-law of Hans Morell. Elias Fels, represented in a medallion on the bottom, lived in Berne, St. Gallen, and Heidelberg, as a painter of portraits and historical pictures,<sup>5</sup> whereas, Daniell Labartt, depicted in the second roundel on the top, was descended from a distinguished family of the cantons of Basle and Thurgovie, and became mayor of Steckborn, in the year 1589.<sup>6</sup>

That the embroidery had been made in Switzerland is clearly proved by stylistic as well as by historical evidence. On the one hand, it shows the story of a Swiss family; on the other, the embroidery is closely connected in style with other works of indubitable Swiss origin. I mention only those of Jost Amman, the painter and woodcutter of Zürich. Eventually all the technical features are closely related to other Swiss embroideries, executed in the workshops of Zürich. In this town there seems to have been a large production, the examples of which are widespread all over Switzerland and Germany.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Marcel Godet, *Dictionnaire historique et biographique de la Suisse*. Vol. V, Neuchatel, 1930, p. 10. Leu, *Schweizer Lexikon*, 1747-1765. *Schweizer Monatschronik*, 1816, p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> Marcel Godet, *op. cit.*, Vol. V, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Marcel Godet, *op. cit.*, Vol. V, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Marcel Godet, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, Neuchatel, 1926, p. 821.

<sup>6</sup> Marcel Godet, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, Neuchatel, 1928, p. 425. *Anzeiger für Schweizer Geschichte*. X, p. 177.

<sup>7</sup> Otto von Falke, *Gestickte Bildteppiche der Ostschweiz*. Pantheon, 1932. II, p. 20.

This genealogical panel is unique of its kind. Not so much in its form, which was common in this period, but in its artistic value and its iconographical contents. No attitude was too difficult, no action too complicated to be depicted by the pencil of the artist and the needle of the embroiderer, who accomplished the work. The genealogy of a whole family, told in eloquent pictures, every member shown in his particular occupation, seems to be a quite exceptional subject of embroidery. There are, it is true, other embroidered panels in Switzerland, portraying family pictures like the important example from 1598 in the Historical Museum in Basle (Plate II), showing a woman with two husbands and thirteen children, but they are of a more conventional type and do not give such popular and artistic pictures of the contemporary life.



PLATE II

EMBROIDERED PANEL (1598) IN THE HISTORICAL MUSEUM, BASLE, SWITZERLAND.