

## THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS.

FIFTEENTH—SEVENTEENTH CENTURY TAPESTRIES AT THE  
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM.

BY CLARENCE HOBLITZELL.

**T**APESTRY weaving, one of the most ancient arts of man, is also one which, at an early date had attained a high degree of perfection. It is interesting to know that the exquisite products of the Gobelins in the eighteenth century—products reflecting the taste and skill of the greatest capital in Europe, but repeated, in technical treatment at least, the work of the weavers of tapestry in Egypt two thousand years before. To go no farther back than the evidence presented by the early Christian tombs with their eloquent riches in embroidered and woven fabrics, we are confronted with the fact that even in the number of warp threads to a given space, the modern technique is curiously similar to the old. And going farther back still we behold in the wall-paintings three thousand years before Christ, representations of tapestry looms like the hand looms now in use.

The long and, so far as existing examples of tapestry are concerned, silent interval of the first centuries of the Christian era in Western Europe, together with the early years of the Romanesque and Gothic periods, have passed, leaving few fragments of a handiwork costly in time and money, and always held in esteem by the great and noble. The Cathedral of Halberstadt, Germany, and the museums of Lyons, Nuremburg and South Kensington possess pieces dating from the latter part of the twelfth century, the so-called Bayeux Tapestry embroidered by Queen Matilda of England, having been wrought a hundred years before. Examples of tapestry of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are also rare, so ruthless the tooth of time and the despoiling touch of vandal and robber, one consuming the soft wool of the weft, the other, more consum-

mately destroying the entire fabric for the gold wherewith it was often heavily woven.

From the fifteenth-sixteenth century appreciation, however, re-born and quickened into life in all directions of art by the flaming wonder of the Renaissance, we may claim more treasures of the loom, and from then till the present, tapestry has been woven at times in various parts of the world: in Russia, in Italy, Germany, Spain, France, Flanders, England, and to-day in America as well (notably at the famous works of Mr. William Baumgarten started



BAPTISM.\*

in 1893 at Williamsbridge, N. Y., where the best traditions of the art are faithfully adhered to.)

It has been said that early tapestries are rare, and this is especially true of suites of tapestry where the story is shown in a series of cartoons. Such a suite was recently acquired in France and presented to the Metropolitan Museum by its president, Mr. J. Pierpont Morgan. It is in five pieces, two of which are double compositions, and represents the Seven Sacraments, the figures being the size of life. These tapestries are Burgundian of the early fifteenth century, and

\* This series of illustrations is reproduced from photographs of Burgundian Gothic tapestries of the 15th century, presented by Mr. J. P. Morgan to the Metropolitan Museum of New York.

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CONFIRMATION.



were probably woven at Arras. They convey a good impression of the restraint and sober richness of the great Gothic period, its romance and mystery, its art and life. The quaint costumes of both men and women, gorgeous in brocade, embroidery and miniver, the formality of composition with its diapered or powdered back-



THE HOLY EUCHARIST.

ground, the constrained figure drawing, and the serious, even pensive expression of the faces are all characteristic of early fifteenth century art.

Pathetic wrecks, as the pieces are of their original splendid state when stiff with gold and brilliant in color they hung in royal chapel

or on abbey wall, their spirit remains, though its material garment has suffered the ravages of five hundred years. Still beautiful, they survive as monuments to the art of their time. What vicissitudes, what wars and storms have they endured, and into how many hands, both gentle and harsh, have they passed since then. Looking at these sober browns, pale yellows, dull crimsons fading to faint vermillion, and grays shaded with opaque blue, they compose superb if low-toned harmonies upon the quiet walls where they are now enshrined. Maugre their mutilation and faded glory and the departed gold from their diapered ground, the elements of their interest and beauty exist indisputably.



PENANCE.

HOLY ORDERS.

What a far cry it is from the world of the early fifteenth to that of the period of the middle seventeenth century. Already the glorious achievements of the Cinquecento seem a golden volume closing forever. The flashing light of the Italian Renaissance had ravished Europe with a flood of beauty in painting, sculpture and the applied arts, with wonders of science and statesmanship, with inventions and unparalleled discoveries, yet how soon the glowing torch fell into darkness. Velasquez in Spain, and Rubens, Van Dyck, Hals and Rembrandt with a host of lesser yet marvelous contemporaries in Holland and the Netherlands, ascended the tribune built by Brunelleschi in Florence in 1407, and occupied by

Italy's inspired sons who for two hundred years had poured the ichor of their genius upon the slowly fructifying North.

Fine tapestry had been made in Flanders as early as the twelfth century. During the country's rise to prominence, the manufacture of tapestry steadily increased till in the sixteenth century Brussels was making the finest quality and the greatest amount in the world. In the following century the famous factories continued their efforts, but towards the middle of the century the decadence of taste had set in, Italian art was already rococo. The Flemings and the Dutch artists, from the very nature of their remarkable and untraditional



MARRIAGE.

EXTREME UNCTION.

art were but a detriment to the history of tapestry. Their genre scenes and portraits proved the end of the Renaissance as they also sounded the final death note of the Gothic period. Hence the tapestries of Brussels, save in instances where orders were given for subjects in the old manner, reflect the changed conditions. The designs are large, agitated, out of scale, high lights are used profusely and the compositions become pictures rather than woven hangings and subsidiary backgrounds.

Among the other tapestries at the Metropolitan Museum is a

Brussels suite of this period, about 1650. There are five large pieces with figures rather more than the size of life, representing scenes from the lives of Antony and Cleopatra. They are all marked with the double B (Brussels and Brabant) of the Brussels factory, and the names of the weavers Jan van Leefdael and Gerard van der Strechen, woven in the separate pieces. It is known that Rubens contributed cartoons illustrating the lives of Antony and Cleopatra, and this suite was evidently woven from designs by the master. The different pieces are in perfect condition, the general tones being yellow, golden and claret browns, with touches of deep blue and dull green, while a predominant note of warm gray, almost a cream color is used for the sky and the high lights. Elaborate borders surround each design. The end of the century is suggested in these dramatic tapestries in which the disturbed figures crowd the limits of the composition. But although the lines are torturing to the eye seeking repose and esthetic selection, there is still something large about them. It is the decadence, but the decadence tinged with the memory of great principles not yet entirely overthrown. We realize this in the aristocratic elegance of the color scheme used throughout the suite. The total absence of the vermilion and flat blues which distinguish later work and the vigor of the somewhat careless drawing both remove them from the pretty or exasperating things turned out during the last years of the century. The technique also bears witness to the excellence of the factory, the pieces being woven with a full, soft weft which presents a surface of great regularity and beauty. The suite, originally in possession of the Barberini, afterwards passed into the hands of the late King Ludwig of Bavaria. It was bequeathed to the Museum by Mrs. Elizabeth U. Coles in memory of her son.