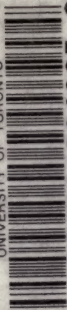


UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



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# FRENCH FURNITURE





FRONTISPIECE



CUPBOARD. XVI Century. School of Du Cerceau.  
Cluny Museum



# FRENCH FURNITURE

BY ANDRÉ SAGLIO



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## INTRODUCTION



THE history of furniture in a country of a civilisation so old and so brilliant as that of France is a very different thing from a technical review of archæology or art. It is the history of the very soul of a people, with its alternations of grandeur and of degradation, of achievement and of failure ; in a word, it is the history of the inner life of a nation, a life that is too often overlooked in studying the glorious or tragic episodes in which kings and nobles overshadow their subjects. Yet those subjects are as important as dynasties in the annals of history. Turn, for instance, for a moment from the accounts of the victories of this or that conqueror to the home of some one of the men whose destinies he controls. How sudden is the change to gloom ! The furniture is of the very simplest description, ready for immediate flight or exile, and its owner's poverty proves that art and industry are alike paralysed. Some other ruler who has left behind him a great reputation

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for luxury and generosity, if judged by the unbridled extravagance indulged in in every household during his reign, will appear in the novel character of a disorganiser of domestic economy. The intellect, the conscience, the vital force of a race is often concealed behind the deceptive personalities of its chiefs, and it is really in studying the condition of the people that an insight can be obtained into their moral history. For this reason, it is desirable to bring something more than a mere artistic curiosity to bear upon the changes which in the course of centuries have taken place in such furniture as tables, seats, and beds, for these humble objects have been the inseparable companions of many owners through many vicissitudes.

To these general considerations, applicable to the study of domestic art in every country, we must add one which has special reference to the genius of France, and will be to some extent the guiding principle of this book. The sons of the soil in that country were never, strictly speaking, inventors, they never evolved the primary germ of a new style ; but they had a marvellous gift for assimilating the foreign ideas with which they were brought in contact, and, as it were, recasting in the powerful crucible of their brain enfeebled, incomplete, or decadent exotic conceptions,



## INTRODUCTION

issuing them anew to the world in the form of works instinct with vigour and vitality, and stamped with the grace and truth of proportion that are the distinctive characteristics of French taste. The great events, whether of peace or war, which brought the French into communication with other nations were therefore, it is evident—as will be proved in the course of our narrative—the natural causes of the succession of different styles which arose in France during the course of some two thousand years.

We take up our story at the birth of the French national character—the result of a happy fusion of Romano and Celtic elements; we lay it down on the threshold of the nineteenth century, for in our opinion the modern period is essentially one of transition, during which popular taste is unconsciously and, as it were, secretly adapting the home of the day to the requirements and theories that are the outcome of an age of unparalleled scientific progress. It is indeed always somewhat rash to criticise work without making allowance for the natural recoil of time, and contemporaneous opinion is ever ready to recognise the decadence of its own epoch. The *laudator temporis acti* does not date from the time of Horace only, and we should hesitate long before we lose confidence in a people

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such as the French, who have proved themselves able during so many centuries to give birth to great revivals at the very moment when their creative vigour appeared to be finally exhausted.

ANDRÉ SAGLIO.

## THE FIRST CHAPTER

### THE GAULS, THE GALLO-ROMANS, AND THE INVADERS OF GAUL



WHEN the Romans took possession of Gaul they had to contend with a strong, intelligent, and numerous population, divided into a multitude of tribes, the civilisation of which could only be called barbarous when compared with the extraordinary development of Italy. In his "Commentaries" Cæsar recognises this civilisation, and does not fail to acknowledge the skill of the conquered tribes in the construction of fortified cities or the wisdom of their legislators; but, unfortunately, he is silent on the details of their domestic life, which must have been familiar to every one in his day. Not a trace, not so much as a memory, now remains of Gallic furniture; even conjecture is forbidden in view of the fact that the very language spoken from the English Channel to the Mediterranean no more than twenty centuries ago has become a mystery; and in the tombs that have been opened nothing but a few weapons and jewels have been found. These relics, however, confirm the belief in

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the skill of the Gauls in working metal, whilst the tradition that they were the first coopers points to their having been clever at turning and shaping wood.

The sudden and apparently complete swallowing up of Gallic civilisation in Latin manners and customs, makes it impossible to begin the study of French furniture before the earliest owners of the soil had become so merged in their conquerors as to form with them but a single race—the Gallo-Romans. At the same time may be said to have been evolved the first germ of the essentially French character so admirably adapted to art development, which was the outcome of the fusion between barbarian audacity and imagination and Latin sense of proportion and adaptability.

Less than a century after the conquest the conical roofed mud huts of the Celts were replaced by villas built and furnished in imitation of those of Italy, of which Gaul was now a province, and the sole aim of their designers was to copy the lavish luxury of the masters who had reduced the whole world, as well as Gaul, to subjection. Unbridled indulgence in the pleasures of the appetite became as much the fashion with the wealthy citizens of Roman Gaul as with the patricians of the capital—dining-tables were inlaid with costly

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## THE GAULS

marqueterie, rich furs and embroidered cushions adorned the couches on which the guests reclined. A fifth-century Bishop of Lyons, Sidonius Apollinaris, has left us a description in elegant verse of a *fête* at the house of one of his contemporaries, and his indulgent Christian spirit displays nothing but admiration for the luxurious accessories of the feast. "The end of the day approaches," he says, "let wine, dancing, and merry-making delight its closing hours. Here are couches draped with purple, revellers eagerly drinking purple nectar. Behold ! all is luxury ; everything is glittering ; the eye is charmed at every turn. Here is furniture from Asia, there furniture from Greece ; everywhere are sculptures and paintings, sanguinary hunting scenes in which no life is lost, groups of wounded men where not a drop of blood is shed. It is indeed a pleasure to wander amongst the masses of bloom drooping from the plants in the alabaster urns, to yield the body to the seductions of the graceful and languid dance, and to mimic the trembling limbs of the Bacchantes overcome by wine ! . . . Here blooms the cythus, the lily, and the jonquil. . . . Already the incense brought from its native land of Arabia is burning in the swinging lamps, its smoke rising up to the gorgeous roof ! . . ."

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At the very time when the Bishop was thus celebrating the delights of this refined, but effeminate life, Roman Gaul was already being invaded by the barbarians of the East and North. These were the Germani, of whom the Franci, or Franks, were but a tribe; the Burgundii, succeeded by the Huns; the Avars, and the Goths. Fierce warriors, ignorant of art and intellectual culture, they had but the savage passion for brilliant-looking objects, such as precious metals—which, by the way, they knew how to work, probably through their Asiatic traditions—and though Attila himself chose to affect simplicity in the presence of the Roman ambassadors by eating out of a wooden platter and sitting on a simple stool, the Avar chiefs who succeeded him used couches of embossed gold with silken draperies, which served them alike as beds and thrones. The Goths, especially, amassed an enormous treasure, alluded to by Gregory of Tours and Fredegarius, which, amongst other valuables, included a table formed of a single emerald encircled with three rows of pearls, and upheld by sixty-five feet of solid gold encrusted with precious stones, the total value of which was estimated at five hundred thousand pieces of gold. The ravages committed by these hordes, who flung themselves upon the Roman

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Empire, suffering as it then was from an excess of luxury, were far less destructive than is generally supposed. The Iconoclasts who, with ferocious delight, broke to pieces works of art were but a small minority of degraded tribes. The greater number of the invading hosts had indeed a certain technical skill of their own that was by no means to be despised, as proved by the jewellery that has during the last fifty years been dug up all over Europe; they pillaged a great deal more than they destroyed, and often, with some crude notion of religion, they enriched the churches of France and Italy with their plunder. It must not be forgotten that Attila had his own portrait painted in a palace at Milan, and that Theodoric appointed a magistrate whose special business it was to look after the preservation of the masterpieces of antiquity. The barbarians were really ambitious of continuing to live in the luxurious style of the Romans, but in their coarseness and ignorance they only recognised the external evidences of that luxury, without comprehending that the source of its refined delights was the intellectual culture of the Latin race. This will explain how it was that domestic art in Gaul, instead of spreading rapidly, was merely gradually transformed into the heavy, massive style that very



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distinctly dominates the architectural traditions of the Latin races, and is known in art history as the Romanesque—a title which enshrines the old familiar name of “Roman.”

To understand the subject now under notice it is necessary briefly to consider the tendencies of the earliest Frankish kings, amongst whom the exclusive love of shining metal completely dominated their interest in art. To own silver dishes and golden cups easily carried about in the vicissitudes of war, represented to them the very height of luxury and good fortune. Thierry gave Clotaire a silver dish to make amends for an attempt at assassination ; and a valuable vase, now at Soissons, was the cause of the famous quarrel between Clovis and his warriors. By slow degrees all æsthetic refinement became concentrated in the abbeys, where certain intellectual traditions were preserved, although a certain St. Ouen in his history takes Tullius Cicero for two distinct personages, and the biographer of St. Bavon commits himself to the assertion that the Latin language predominated in Athens during the ascendancy of Pisistratus. Some few religious houses became positive art manufactories, under the liberal patronage of the kings and of private citizens of wealth, jewellery, of



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course, being the chief product. When Clotaire wished to have a throne made that should be worthy of his important position, he chose a humble artisan from Limoges to do the work—an artisan who later became celebrated, and is still dear to the memory of the French under the name of St. Eloi. A man of great gifts and of the highest integrity, St. Eloi retained the favour of two kings, and to him is due the credit of raising the making of jewellery in France to the importance of a fine art, whilst he at the same time kept up the intimate connection between work and religion. He converted a property given to him by Dagobert, the successor of Clotaire, into a great *atelier* for the working of precious metals. He founded at Paris the convent of St. Aure, in which the nuns devoted themselves to embroidering in gold; and round about his church of St. Paul des Champs in a quarter long known as the "Culture Saint Eloi" were grouped the workshops of the chasers and beaters of metal. Tradition attributes to him a gilded bronze arm-chair, preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris, which served as the throne of Dagobert. As a matter of fact, however, it cannot be more than a copy made of the golden throne not long after its completion, and used by that ostentatious and cultivated monarch

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when he presided over the meetings of his *leudes*—as his faithful advisers were called. Such as it is, however, it remains an interesting example of the barbaric modification of the Latin style, for whilst its general form is that of an antique curule chair such as was used by the chief magistrate of Rome, its feet, ornamented with the claws and heads of lions, have really in their rugged strength something novel about them.

A century later, under Charlemagne, we note a final development of luxury according to the traditions of the ancient Romans. The architects and decorative artists of Aix-la-Chapelle—a town rich in palaces, churches, and baths, the favourite residence of the all-powerful emperor—all came from Italy. Lavish display was the rule at table, as was the fashion in ancient times; the Emperor, wisely economical in his personal expenses, was prodigal when it was a question of enhancing the glory of the monarchy; and on one occasion, probably at Aix, he caused three wonderful tables to be made, one of gold, on which was represented the earth as then known, with the fixed stars and planets; whilst on the others, both of solid silver, were seen the plans of Rome and of Constantinople.

Unfortunately, no relics now remain of

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these pieces of furniture of fabulous beauty ; they have in the course of centuries disappeared as completely as the humblest utensils in use amongst the peasantry. Indeed, there are no archæological survivals in France of earlier date than the thirteenth century on which to found a history of early furniture, except the arm-chair of Dagobert of doubtful authenticity, and a little stool, very crudely carved, preserved in the treasury of the Cathedral of Poitiers, under the name of the Pulpit of St. Radegund, which points to the sixth century as the time of its production. Scholars who have endeavoured to work out some theory on the subject of French furniture of the first half of the Middle Ages have been obliged to have recourse to a comparison with the relics preserved in Italy, and with those in Scandinavia. Their learned but debatable theories cannot, however, be discussed here, for to admit them would be beyond the scope of a work that is to deal with facts only.

The most ancient existing piece of furniture in France is of a kind that only came into domestic use some eight centuries ago : a wooden *armoire*, or wardrobe, that belonged to the Church of Obazine, in the Department of Corrèze. Nothing could be more simple or massive than its square structure, decorated



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merely with a few simple semicircular arches in the Roman style, upheld by slender little pillars, the two leaves of the folding-doors of oak, each held in place by clamps of iron, known as hinges, and closed with straight bolts running in a groove, also of iron. This humble, half-destroyed piece of furniture is of infinite value, on account of the information it gives on the subject of the art of the carpenter up to the time of its production. To begin with, it proves that style in furniture followed exactly the gradual transformation of Latin architecture; moreover, it shows that sculpture was not employed for the decoration of domestic articles. This fact leads, further, to the suggestion that furniture was painted, confirmed by relics of very little later date than the *armoire* of Obazine, such as that of the Cathedral of Noyon, the folding-doors of which still retain a canvas glued on, on which can be made out the painted figures of angels and traces of foliage. It was not until the structure of furniture was modified, the size of the panels becoming smaller, whilst more iron-work was required, that the painting intended to relieve the monotony of the wide spaces of wood gave place to mouldings masking the joints.

The two pieces of furniture just mentioned, to which we have given the name *armoires*, so



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as to convey a clear idea of their form and use, were known in mediæval times as *bahuts* or *huches*, hence the term *huchiers*, long used to denote the corporation of carpenters or joiners. The *bahut*, often referred to at greater length in old MSS. as the *coffre de bahut*, is really nothing more than a simple chest or coffer mounted upon feet or rests. It was probably as a rule the only piece of furniture in domestic use in France in the primitive times, when famines, war, and the constant change of residence of the Court made it often necessary hastily to transport all the royal belongings from place to place in carts. The *bahut* may have served as a seat during the day, but at night it was turned into a bed by the addition of coverings; at times it held all the worldly goods of the family to which it belonged, and could be converted rapidly from an *armoire* into a trunk. Probably, also, the *huche* was originally used as a table, and this, again, was often converted into a "dresser," a name implying that it had two ends; the silver and gold plate and drinking-vessels, always a valuable part of the household goods, being "dressé," or set up on it between meals—hence the name of "dresser" for the humble set of shelves to be found in every French or English kitchen. Nothing, therefore, could have been more

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simple for many a long day than the living-room even of the king and the greatest nobles. In a few minutes it could be rearranged in the first *château* or the first inn reached by chance on a journey. The *bahuts* were at once unpacked, out came the familiar tapestries and painted canvases from home, to be quickly nailed upon the walls, the coverings and pillows for the beds, the plate to be set up on the dresser, the carpet to be spread upon the floor, or in default of it the straw or sweet-smelling plants often used instead. It was not until the fifteenth century that the custom of taking the home environment unaltered everywhere was abandoned. It is easy to understand that under such conditions furniture remained very much the same—at least domestic furniture, for that of churches, on the other hand, developed in a remarkable manner. Under the all-powerful protection of the clergy, the *huchiers* were able to relieve the monotony of design to which they were restricted by their lay patrons. From the thirteenth century a truly wonderful imaginative power was displayed, especially in the execution of choir-stalls, as the rows of seats on either side of the choir opposite the altar were called, where during the celebration of divine service sat the priests, monks, and lay dignitaries. The principle of this arrange-

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ment was, no doubt, borrowed from the churches of Italy and the East, a fact that suggests the possibility of arm-chairs having been at first made of stone, though that material, too cold to the touch for a Northern climate, was probably very soon replaced by wood, of which many chairs must have been made long before the thirteenth-century examples, which are the oldest that have been preserved. The stalls of Notre Dame de la Roche date from the early part of the thirteenth century, for the church was consecrated in 1232. They reflect in a very marked degree the best ecclesiastical architecture of the same period, in the simple grace of their clustered columns and airy arches, whilst the carved foliage decorating them recalls that in the projections on the under-sides of the seats of the choir-stalls half the height of a man, to which the name of *misereres* or *patiences* was given, because they enabled the priests using them to rest without appearing to do so during the fatiguing services at which they were supposed to stand.

The Cathedral of Poitiers has also retained seventy stalls of workmanship as fine as that of those in Notre Dame de la Roche, which were executed by order of Bishop Jean de Melun, who died in 1257. The skilful but modest artists who designed them hit upon



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the happy device of leaving a souvenir of themselves by introducing amongst the carvings the miniature figure of a seated *huchier* holding his compass in his hand. Lastly must be mentioned the carved seats of the church of Saint Andoche de Saulieu, which are a good deal mutilated, but mark in a very noticeable manner the transition from the thirteenth to the fourteenth century in the great increase of small sculptures, forming what may be called pictures framed in the architecture. Some of the designs seem to have been inspired by the drawings in a curious contemporary book, the "Album" of the architect Villard de Honnecourt.

It is now time to say a few words on the sources from which artists drew their ideas, very succinctly of course, for if we dwell too much on this point that might embark us on a vast enterprise, we shall be in danger of forgetting that the title of our work limits us to the consideration of the productions of the *huchiers*, or furniture-makers. Before entering on the epoch rich in examples, in which the transition of styles can be clearly distinguished, it seems to us necessary to point out, as clearly as the obscurity in which the Middle Ages are involved will permit, how French æstheticism could develop from its crude and barbarous manifestation in the chair of Dagobert to its



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delicate florescence in the wood carvings of Notre Dame de la Roche and Poitiers.

From the end of the reign of Charlemagne, or, to be strictly accurate, from that of Charles the Bald, to Louis VI., in other words, from the middle of the ninth to the eleventh century, France appears to the historian to have been wrapped in an almost impenetrable night of barbarism; the monarchy was degraded, the feudal lords were mere brigands, the weak were grossly oppressed, and raids from bands of Scandinavian pirates were of frequent occurrence. The tenth century was marked by a culmination of horrors, epidemics were succeeded by famines, in many places human flesh was actually devoured by starving wretches, whilst added to all the rest was the ever-present dread of the approaching end of the world, predicted for the year 1000. There was no brightness left on the despairing earth! . . . Yes, there was one little ray, the flickering flame of art lit by St. Eloi, and still kept burning in the recesses of the monasteries. There the peaceful monks, indifferent to everything but the promotion of the glory of God, continued patiently to beat out precious metals, to cut and set valuable gems, producing works of art in which Latin traditions were gradually modified as a new and strange development began. Hawkers and pedlars

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brought images from Byzantium, the last outpost of civilisation, silks from Persia embroidered with representations of unknown animals, *cloisonné* enamels, the secret of the manufacture of which had been revealed to the artisans of Constantinople by their fellow craftsmen of the remote confines of Asia. All this acted as a strong stimulant on the imagination of the monks—who copied, imitated, and combined designs, insensibly Gallicising them. At Limoges *champlevé* enamels were turned out of an even more sumptuous appearance than the *cloisonnés* they were intended to copy, yet which cost a hundred per cent. less. The year 1000 passed harmlessly away, and the world was transported with a deep feeling of gratitude to the divine goodness that had spared it. "It seemed," said the chronicler Glaber, "as if it had shaken itself free of its old age to clothe itself with the white ecclesiastical robe" (*instar ac si . . . candidam ecclesiarum vestem indueret*). Presently the treasures of art began to spread beyond the monasteries; the humblest artisan, sustained by religious faith, turned out art work; on every side churches sprang up in which the Roman arch was abandoned, uplifting to Heaven their more or less pointed ogives, like hands joined in devotion, the details of their architecture enriched with

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stone carvings representing an infinite variety of flora and fauna of superhuman beauty, whilst the light of Heaven poured into them through splendid stained-glass windows like the precious stones in some dream of glory. In 1025 the Synod of Arras alluded to the paintings in consecrated buildings as the books of the illiterate; and the famous Abbot Suger inscribed in Latin verse on the doorway of St. Denis the admirable definition of the union of art with faith: "It is neither gold nor lavish outlay that should be admired here; if the work is brilliant, its glory should illuminate souls and lead them by its light to the true light of which Christ is the only source. . . . The sluggish spirit of man is raised by means of material things to the contemplation of immaterial truth."

Thus the most beautiful of all renaissances—and never was that word more justly used—succeeded the depth of human humiliation by means of the aspiration which faith alone was able to arouse. The worst of all catastrophies was expected, and, in obedience to the law of reaction that is of such almost constant potency in history, a splendid era suddenly succeeded that of dread. Moreover, other events, one after another, occurred to add to the artistic, that is to say, the moral,



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glory of France, although at first they seemed likely to be its ruin. We allude to the Crusades, which, strange to say, historians have always looked upon as warlike enterprises only, that retarded the moral and material progress of the world. Is it necessary to dwell upon the fact that the number of soldiers who took part in the Crusades was very small in comparison with the population who remained at home engaged in their usual work? The troops were, of course, led by the so-called "finest flower of chivalry," but truth to tell that fine flower consisted of the fierce and ignorant feudal nobles, hostile to the unity of the country, whose habit of plundering on all the main roads had hitherto contributed so greatly to the general misery. Some of them remained upon the battlefields of the East; those who returned were completely changed in character. Their habits had been modified by a different climate and still more by frequent and courteous intercourse with the great Saracen chieftains, from whom they had obtained new ideas of what true magnificence and refinement really were. Henceforth nothing was wanting to the full development of French genius; side by side with religious art, under the control of the Church and paid for out of her inexhaustible treasury, might now flourish that of the



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civil community, for artisans were now able to produce works as sumptuous as they liked, secure of finding amongst the wealthy nobility patrons sufficiently appreciative of their beauty to be willing to buy them at any price.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER

### THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY



THE most noteworthy characteristic of the fourteenth century was that luxury—derived exclusively during the eleventh and thirteenth centuries from religious sources—became purely secular. Our remarks in the preceding chapter shadowed forth that logical evolution. An outburst of intense faith such as that which succeeded the terror of the year 1000, was not likely to continue in all the purity and fervour which during nearly two hundred years produced successively such masterpieces of architecture and sculpture that are, in my opinion, the most naïvely charming works of art ever conceived. A bargaining spirit leavened piety even in the time of Philip the Fair, who dared to defy the Pope, encouraged the schism of Avignon, and ruined the order of the Knights Templars; already the Crusaders of the last expeditions to the Holy Land thought less of the sufferings of Christ than of the wealth and luxury of the Orient, whilst artisans, as we have seen in the case of the church of

## THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

Saulieu, began to allow secondary considerations to influence them. Certain fragments of ecclesiastical wood-carvings of the new century really remind one of the frames of looking-glasses; in the choir-stalls of the Chaise Dieu, which were, according to tradition, carved by the monks themselves, mediocrity is triumphantly displayed in the way the oak is slashed about, and the subjects of the medallions are most irreverently fantastic, a monkey or a pig appearing dressed as a monk, or a donkey playing the organ. The stalls of the Cathedral of Lisieux, with their confusion of decorative foliage and the number of inappropriate animals' heads carved upon the *miserere*s, have similar defects, whilst the elbow-rests in the church of St. Benoît-sur-Loire represent grotesque human figures. Examples of a similar kind might be multiplied. In all the ecclesiastical cabinet-work of the fourteenth century which has come down to us, the skill of execution is even greater than the strength and durability; in the cathedrals of Toul, Dol, and Dijon, for instance, worked a number of wonderfully gifted carvers in wood, the names of many of whom have been preserved, notably Pierre of Neufchâteau, Jean of Liège, Guillaume of Marcilly, Pierre and Guillaume Picheneau, Philippot Viard, and certain Flemings, who

## FRENCH FURNITURE

are often confounded with their French fellow workmen, such as Laurent of Ysbres, surnamed Flamenc, Pierre Moselmen, Hennequin of Antwerp, &c.

The so-called *huchiers*, or cabinet-makers, moreover, soon won the distinction of being looked upon as distinct from the mere ordinary carpenters. In 1371 Hugues Aubriot, then Provost of Paris, defined their obligations and duties in a sentence pronounced by him—a sentence confirmed by an edict of Parliament dated September 4, 1382. Louis XI., Henri III., and Louis XIV. each in turn modified in various edicts the statutes of the powerful Corporation, of which the following points may be stated here to avoid having to recur to the subject.

No one could aspire to the title of a master cabinet-maker who had not served an apprenticeship of six years, at the end of which he would have to submit to an examination before a selected jury, and be called upon to execute in the house of one of them, without any assistance, a masterpiece on some prescribed theme that should test to the uttermost his power of dealing successfully with the difficulties of his profession. The manufacture of any furniture in wood except in the licensed *ateliers* was strictly forbidden, as was also the buying or selling of anything



## THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

produced elsewhere. To set against these restrictions master cabinet-makers were bound to send forth none but work of the highest quality, alike of material and execution; it must all be in *bon bois loyal et marchand*, under penalty of having anything inferior publicly burnt before their doors, and having to pay a fine of ten crowns. Long and minutely detailed sets of rules were issued as to how different kinds of furniture were to be made—for instance, the feet of *armoires* in which valuable property was to be kept must be of a certain size and weight; it was suggested that desks, benches with backs, and couches or beds should be “delicately” made, that the ornamentation of chairs and stools should be appropriate, and, lastly, that everything should be in the French style.

The names here given to furniture are those used in the last edition of the Rules of the Corporation—that is to say, the one issued in 1645. It must not, however, be supposed that the houses of the fourteenth century were suddenly enriched with a number of new pieces of furniture. The *bahut*, or chest, the wooden arm-chair covered with painted canvas, the table, the bed, and the bench were as yet all that the imagination of the *huchiers* had evolved, or, in other words, all that the ideas of the time with regard to luxury and comfort

## FRENCH FURNITURE

exacted from them. Moreover, it was still, as in earlier times, essential that furniture should be easily portable on a journey—a fact that regulated its shape, size, and weight.

If we were restricted in our consideration of the domestic furniture of this brilliant period to describing the examples left to us, our task would be an embarrassing one. All that remain are a few chests, one of the most beautiful of which is in the Sculpture Room of the Cluny Museum. On the outside, beneath the arcades, are carved the figures of the twelve peers of France in the warlike costume of the end of the thirteenth century, on the cover is a series of bas-reliefs representing scenes from married life, jugglers, and grotesque animals. Not a single example of a chair or an arm-chair can be quoted, and this scarcity need not much surprise us when we remember that most houses only contained a single seat, that of the master, whilst the rest of the inmates were content to sit on the floor-cushions, known as *carreaux*, or hassocks. We are able to gain some idea of the furniture of princely houses at the time when the Monarchy of France was struggling for its very existence in the never-ceasing civil troubles, and under stress of an interminable foreign war, by reference to the "Comptes de l'Argenterie," or accounts of the finance minister,

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who was long called the *argentier*. The number and value of the purchases there set down would indeed be surprising, if nothing were considered but the demands upon the treasury necessitated by the political events of the day, but it must be remembered that even the most cautious rulers, such as Philip the Fair and Charles V., were as prodigal, so far as buying luxuries was concerned, as were even the insane John the Good and the mad Charles VI., so that it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that there was a good reason for this extraordinary expenditure in the necessity for maintaining the prestige of the Monarchy in the eyes of the great vassals of the Crown, who were almost as noble and powerful as the King himself. The accounts for 1316 include an order for two arm-chairs from the "image maker" Martin Maalot for King Philip V., surnamed the Tall, and two chairs for the Queen; in the following year, that of the Coronation, the Court was supplied with a large number of *bahuts*, chests, in which to pack the King's robes, his bed, the accessories of his devotions, and the spices, then so costly, for his table. Two chests were reserved for the Queen's bed, and ten for the rest of her belongings, and in addition to these are mentioned two "gilded caskets for her head," which were most likely boxes for her head-



## FRENCH FURNITURE.

dressers. The chests, also enumerated, intended to carry "rooms" require a little special explanation.

We have already referred above to the fact that the great nobles, and even plain citizens of wealth, used to travel about with all their family goods packed in huge chests which at stopping-places served as furniture. The portion of this luggage known as the "rooms" contained the hangings that were fastened to the walls of the lodgings with hooks and cords, and the coverings for the beds. The hangings generally consisted of tapestry, that varied according to the season of the year. This is how it comes about that in documents relating to the royal household such expressions occur as the Easter Room, the All Saints Room, the Christmas Room, &c. Occasionally, however, the name applies rather to the subject of the tapestry than to the time of year ; for instance, we read of the Room of the Cross ; of the Lions ; of the Conquest of England ; of Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons ; of the Nine Prussians, and so on. The bed was surmounted by a canopy with three curtains, and above the King's toilet-table was another smaller canopy. At the end of the century, "rooms" made of leather prepared and painted by a process invented in Spain came into use, to which were given



## THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

the appropriate name of Cordovan chambers ; in 1416 the Duc de Berri had such a room made in red leather, adorned with several shields in gules, that is to say, in red with three bands of silver surrounding the coat of arms of Castile ; and Queen Isabella of Bavaria sent for six leather carpets to match the summer hangings of one of her rooms. The Coronation Room of Queen Jeanne of Burgundy, which has served us as a pretext for these explanations, was the most sumptuous ever seen, for it was embroidered in gold, with no less than 1321 parrots, and the coat of arms of the Duke of Burgundy.

Not only does a perusal of the "Accounts of the Minister of the Royal Finances" reveal how gorgeous were the travelling *bahuts*, or chests. There is the item of two dining-tables, also for Jeanne of Burgundy, one with folding-leaves, both with feet of ebony and ivory. Clemence of Hungary, wife of Louis X., surnamed "le Hutin," or the quarreller, had an arm-chair made of copper, such as was then manufactured in the neighbourhood of Dinan (hence the term *dinanderie*, still applied to copper-work), and had it covered with velvet by an artisan of the name of Gilbert le Chasublier, or the chasuble-maker. When, as was customary, a seat was to be covered with painted canvas, it was usual,

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as well as natural, to apply, not to a maker of chasubles, but to an illuminator. Thus we find the Court Painter Girard of Orleans commissioned in 1352 to paint and carve the thrones to be used on the occasion of the marriage of Blanche of Bourbon to the King of Castile. He it was, too, who in 1364 made those for the Coronation of Charles V., and he worked for John the Good even during the latter's captivity in England. For the house of the King richly carved benches were also made—the larger ones known as *bancs de taille*, or waist-high benches; the others as forms. The accounts also include dressers, daïs, footstools to be placed in front of the benches, carved animals as ornaments for the feet of furniture, and buffets or sideboards, which were apparently merely low dressers.

In the celebrated library formed by Charles V. in a tower of the Louvre the cabinet-makers Jacques de Parvis and Jean Grobois executed some important panelling work, and did a good deal of restoring of old furniture. The walls were wainscoted with oak from Holland; the ceiling was of carved cypress-wood; the windows were provided with iron gratings to prevent birds from flying in, glass being as yet little used; and cabinets divided into three stories were constructed, in which, as was then the custom,

## THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

MSS. were kept spread out flat, one division being reserved to specimens of jewellery.

All this gives a singular impression of combined luxury and simplicity. We find Charles VI. appearing in a robe on which were embroidered 1400 jewelled swallows, each holding a golden dish in its mouth. At the same time, however, the King contented himself with sitting on a wooden bench, or a chair, covered with painted canvas; whilst Isabella of Bavaria decked herself with a fabulous quantity of diamonds and other precious stones, yet was ignorant, as were all her contemporaries, of such a thing as a nightdress, and she slept in a room the windows of which consisted of nothing but thin pieces of bone or perhaps of leaves of parchment. In fact, the luxury which prevailed to so great an extent in society in the fourteenth century represents merely the desire to cut a dash in the eyes of others—not a real love of comfort. Barbarism was still really triumphant over Latin culture, and many more years were needed before by slow degrees the desire became general for the refined surroundings which are one of the most noteworthy features of civilisation—a word that must not, by the way, be confounded with the idea of moral progress.

## THE THIRD CHAPTER

### THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY



IN a technical history such as that we are now writing the term "fifteenth century" must be taken to refer, not to a definitely restricted period, but to the school of art which in it carried on the Gothic traditions of that which preceded it. As a matter of fact the influence of the celebrated Italian Renaissance of the sixteenth century made itself felt in the midst of the prolific Gothic age long before the year 1500. To make our work clear, therefore, it seems to us desirable, in spite of rigid dates, to consider in this chapter what may be called the bastard furniture which came into use immediately after the war with Italy began.

Not without reason did we quote the example of Charles VI. and Isabella of Bavaria as a striking instance of the state of mind to which a frenzied love of wealth had brought a people who were still in other respects mediæval barbarians. Their reign indeed was divided between the two centuries, and serves as a permanent symbol of a period of art development that has been



## THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

arbitrarily cut in half by historical classifications.

It is in the wood-carvings of the churches, in which the imagination and skill of the artists were alike unfettered, that can best be studied the easy transition from the grand and simple Gothic of the thirteenth century to the aspiring, attenuated, and complicated ornamentation culminating in the confusion of decoration that won for the final development, in the very moment of its decline, the name of flamboyant. Truth to tell, the passage from one to the other was so imperceptible that the most expert critics are sometimes at a loss to determine the age of a series of choir-stalls within ten years or so. As a general rule the main features of architecture betray their date far more readily than do details of decoration. The latter lose something of their first grace as time goes on ; the noble-looking columns, rising up in their pure, unadulterated beauty, gradually become overburdened with ornamentation, often of fine execution no doubt, but wearisome to the eye by reason of its redundancy. Profane subjects are of frequent occurrence on the *misereres* and elbow-rests of the choir-stalls, whilst the simple wooden canopy above the seat, originally a mere rounded extension of the back, is replaced by an elaborate baldachino at right

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angles so as to provide the insatiable wood-carver with yet another string-course on which to exercise his skill.

The two magnificent, painted and gilded, reredoses from the Carthusian monastery of Dijon, now in the Museum of that town, which were saved from destruction during the Revolution, are admirable examples of the transition period. The monastery to which they belonged was founded in 1380 by Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, whose Court exceeded in luxury even that of Charles the Mad. The reredoses were designed by Jacques de Baerze, a Flemish subject of the Duke, and the beautiful ogives are prophetic of the attenuation of architectural motives in which later *huchiers* were all too ready to indulge.

To gain a really true idea of the transformation that was effected in Gothic architecture by the influence of Northern mannerism, it is also essential to study the marvellous carvings of Amiens. Every line of the architecture is encumbered with quantities of figures, campaniles, and foliage. The church of Brou is even more belated, for it relegates the close of the Gothic period to 1522, whilst that of Amiens would make the date 1508. It is, if possible, even more overlaid with figures of saints, apostles, and patriarchs, executed by

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CHEST. XV Century. Cluny Museum





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the two celebrated *huchiers* Terrasson and Amé le Picard, after the designs of Jean Perréal. On the other hand, it is only fair to add that the famous wood-carvings dating from 1512 in the church of St. Pol de Léon, situated in an intensely conservative province, hostile to innovation, retain the dignified character of earlier work. This late example of Gothic art confirms what we have just said on the necessity of caution in assigning without definite evidence a date to the many works belonging to the transition period, such as those preserved in the Church of the Madeleine at Châteaudun, the collegiate church of Troô (Loir et Cher), the Abbey of Blanche de Mortain, the church of Andelys, that of Gassicourt, near Mantes, the Cathedral of Rodez, that of St. Claude, the Church of the Holy Trinity at Vendôme, that of Charlieu (Loire), of Notre Dame, and of the Carthusian Monastery of Villefranche, with many others which it is unnecessary to name.

Examples of the domestic furniture of this period are pretty numerous, with the exception of beds, which seem all to have disappeared. The design and ornament of all these articles resemble that of the wood-work in ecclesiastical buildings, and they are faithful reflections of the architecture of the period at which they were made ; whilst they in their

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turn supplied motives to the workers in ivory who adorned the lids of coffers, &c., as well as to the painters of the illuminations of missals and manuscripts. It could, indeed, scarcely be otherwise, for at that time artists of every kind were in the habit of congregating about the great centres of luxury and patronage, the habitual residences of the great nobles, and above all at the Courts of the King at Paris and of the Duke of Burgundy at Dijon.

We have already alluded to the latter provincial dukedom as an inexhaustible storehouse of wealth for nearly one hundred and fifty years. In the Museum of Dijon, side by side with the reredoses of Jacques de Baerze, are to be seen some relics of furniture which bear witness to the splendour of the Court, including the central panel of what was once the back of the chair of John the Fearless, than which it would be impossible to imagine anything more rich and delicate. The upper portion encloses within an ogive festooned with foliage the coat of arms of the Duke, upheld by two angels; the lower portion, of rectangular shape, contains the coats of arms of eight feudatory provinces, set in a kind of trellis of delicate workmanship, enriched with foliage and supplemented by four angels playing various instruments

## THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

of music. In this same Museum are to be seen three ivory caskets, which, according to tradition, belonged to the toilette service of the Duchesses of Burgundy; two of them are adorned with arabesques and painted birds, picked out with gold; the third is encircled by a series of scenes from the New Testament, embossed in polychrome. Entries in the archives supplement these costly relics, which are a perfect revelation to the spectator. Fresh acquisitions were constantly made: dressers and benches for Antony of Burgundy, known as le Grand Bâtard; a wooden chest with iron clamps for the reception of gifts of visitors to meet the expenses of an expedition against the infidels of Constantinople; endless descriptions of jewels, paintings, manuscripts, and costly garments are, as it were, sprung upon the student of these wonderful archives.

John Duke of Berri at his Court at Bourges vied in splendour with his powerful brother, Philip the Bold; the Dukes of Orleans, waiting their turn to reign, constantly enriched their *château* of Blois; the Kings of France dissipated their resources betimes, for the treasury was often at a terribly low ebb in the century which witnessed the replacing of Charles the Mad by Charles VII., most effeminate and most lax in principle of any



## FRENCH FURNITURE

of the French princes; the Cabochiens, named after their leader, the butcher, Caboché, were masters of Paris whilst the English were masters of France. Lastly, and above all, all classes of society, were permeated by deep and widespread demoralisation—a demoralisation that did not check luxury, but imbued the people with a distaste for work and for thrift, which are the very foundations of prosperity. The great nobles went forth, to quote the words of a contemporary historian, Bishop Jacques of Vitry, like birds of prey to plunder the churches and to assassinate the plebeians who were guilty of letting their wealth become known. This contempt of right in high places lent sanction to all manner of popular excesses, and many must have been reminded of the Republic of Florence, for the statutes of the new State, drawn up by the victorious burghers, declared that it owed its greatness *pro homicidio, pro furto, pro incesto*, and also of their kindred spirits of England, Jack Straw and John Ball, who said to the mob, “Good people, things will never go well in England so long as goods be not in common, and as long as there be villeins and gentlemen.”

Meanwhile the people imitated the luxury of their oppressors with an eager zeal—which led to an attempt, unsuccessful of course, to check that zeal by sumptuary laws. Even



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during those terrible years of excessive mortality when, as a contemporary wrote in his journal, wolves scoured the country and even ventured at night into the streets of Paris to carry off dead bodies, the common people continued to indulge in wearing costly and luxurious clothes—from which it is natural to conclude that they showed no more discretion in the embellishment of their houses. Unfortunately, actual evidence of this is wanting; or, to speak more correctly, it is all but impossible to prove that this or that piece of furniture which has been preserved in some museum or private collection belonged originally to the household of a burgher, a noble, or an ecclesiastic. This doubt assails us, for instance, in examining the charming table in the Bardac collection, consisting of simple planks set on trestles, the only ornament a little purling, a perfect marvel of combined lightness and strength. Other examples that have come down to us are the set of panels known under the name of the Lit de Justice of the Château of Argenteilles, which now belong to M. Edmond Foule, and appear to have originally formed part of an alcove of that Norman castle. If this be a true attribution—and the most expert judges think that it is—this Lit de Justice proves how very ornate the interiors of private houses were. The so-called bed

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consists of a square canopy, on three sides of which is a double frieze of carvings with floral motives and arcades in the flamboyant style, further enriched with campaniles, pendentives, and figures of children balancing themselves in the air, whilst below an angel with folded wings holds a shield bearing a coat of arms. The panels surmounted by the daïs are adorned with fleurs-de-lys and Gothic ornaments, and the whole structure rises from two steps. All that is needed to form just such a corner of a room as is represented in the miniatures of many old manuscripts is the actual bed with its velvet or tapestry curtains.

The arm-chairs, or thrones, that we are able to cite as examples of skilful carpentry are all of a princely character, such as those in the Cluny Museum bearing the arms of France, or the combined arms of France and Brittany. The most remarkable dates from quite the end of the Gothic period: the back is finished off at the top by a frieze of open-worked vine foliage, and eagles with drooping wings, in the centre, beneath an arch, stand two angels in long robes holding the royal shield surmounted by what is known as a *couronne ouverte*, or a crown consisting of a simple fillet. A large number of authentic and uninjured coffers have come down to us. In quite humble collections specimens of a cha-



CUPBOARD. End of XV Century. Louvre Museum





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racter so simple were to be found as to lend probability to the theory of their plebeian origin. They are nearly all put together in much the same way. The front is divided into a series of little arcades, subdivided in their turn by curves and semi-curves imitated from monumental architecture; the spaces between are often filled in with carved rose-tracery or other floral designs, occasionally with the figures of children. A fine example is the chest in the Cluny Museum from the Abbey of Val Saint Benoît (Saône et Loire); and another typical specimen is one in the Tours Museum, in which the principal panel is divided into rectangular spaces ornamented with a lozenge moulding, each lozenge containing rose-tracery—a motive often also met with on doors. Lastly, though more rarely than the ornaments just described, a series of Gothic arcades is sometimes met with, in each of which is introduced a kneeling figure. It is also worthy of note that the smaller side-panels of chests are generally decorated with the simple but effective linen-fold design, that is not unlike an open book, or, which is perhaps a better comparison, a parchment rolled up at each end.

We will not pause to describe the *armoires*, or wardrobes, which are, as a general rule, nothing more than a chest set upon a bench,

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or two chests one on top of the other. From them we may, however, deduce the fact that the more valuable ones were decorated in the style alluded to above, whilst those intended for humbler purposes had no other embellishment than the iron bands or hinges, the chief purpose of which was to add to the strength of the chests. As very perfect examples of the latter we may quote those lining the walls of the Treasury of St. Germain l'Auxerrois at Paris.

The dresser was the most distinctive article of furniture in the houses of the nobility in the fifteenth century. "Mme. de Charolais," says a writer of the time, "only had four shelves to her dresser, whilst Mme. la Duchesse, her daughter, had five. . . . I have often heard it said," he adds, "that no princess, except the Queen of France, should have five shelves. The dressers of countesses should have three shelves, on which should be ranged dishes, pots, flagons, and large drinking-cups, whilst on the broadest part of the dresser there should be two large wax candles, to be lit when any one is in the room." For all that, however, the dresser is really only a gradual development of the primitive trestle on which chests used to be put down. The finest and most complete specimen we know of is that in the

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Basilewski Collection, bought by the Emperor of Russia, and taken from Paris to St. Petersburg. It is surmounted by a rounded daïs, which recalls that of the choir-stalls of a church. The carving, which is extremely delicate, includes representations of the Annunciation and Nativity, figures of saints and angels, and one of St. John the Evangelist, the last occupying a central position between the folding-doors of the *armoire*.

We could multiply and vary to any extent descriptions of such Gothic furniture, but to do so might lead the reader to lose sight of those general characteristics of mediæval carpentry, the thorough recognition of which, in our opinion, is essential to forming a clear judgment on what at first sight appears to be the confused and complicated work of the artisans of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries.

Before passing, however, to the study of the Renaissance, we must note certain historic data which will enable us to grasp the intellectual transition from one period to another. In the sketch we have given of the fifteenth century, we have had to bear in mind the extraordinary combination it reflects of extreme misery and inordinate luxury, but for all that we must not pretend to ignore the undoubted

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progress made in intellectual culture, slow but sure, which places a gulf between the time of Charles VI. and Louis XII. Side by side with the beautiful and voluptuous Agnes Sorel rose up the heroic and simple-hearted Joan of Arc, who awakened amongst the masses of the people the ennobling idea of patriotism. After Charles VII., a mere shadow of a king, came Louis XI., a prince of iron hand, but acute intelligence, who subdued nobles, conquered provinces, and even introduced the principles of economy into the financial policy of the State.

The moral effect of this policy was incontestable, but at the same time it had a less immediate result upon the manners of the time than historians lead us to suppose. In this connection, also, the special annals of luxury to which we can only now devote a single chapter bring things out in their true proportions. Joan of Arc, simple peasant though she was, was so far imbued with the ideas of her time that she went to battle wearing over her armour a robe woven of gold thread. She was decked out in this style when she was taken prisoner, as is proved by the authentic records of her trial, and Louis XI., the *bourgeois* monarch of popular tradition—who is always, by the way, represented as an old man, who delighted in







STALL. End of XV Century. Paris  
Exhibition, 1900

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wearing a cheap fustian cassock, a rosary round his neck, and on his head a cap with leaden images of the saints round the brim—also had his times of indulgence in the extravagant luxury of a great noble. It would indeed be a great mistake to suppose that he limited the money he spent on furniture to having cages made in which to shut up his enemies. It so happens that entries in the royal accounts reveal that he had a costly aviary set up in his room at Plessis les Tours, in which to keep the rare little birds that he was in the habit of buying by the dozen at a time, and for whose use he had gilded perches made; moreover, he spent a good deal on violet-powder to scent his clothes and rose-water to wash in, put round the neck of his greyhound that he called his *cher ami* a golden collar set with three big rubies and twenty pearls, bought many valuable clocks, games of billiards, and numerous pieces of furniture from the carpenter Jacques Cadot, also pleasure-galleys for boating on the Loire and the Seine, with regular houses on board with glass windows, &c. Do not all these domestic details, too much despised by historians, give an altogether new idea of the great King? Was this Louis XI. in his perfumed robes, walking about with a greyhound decked out like a grand lady, so very unlike in his ways

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and ideas to the lavishly extravagant vassals whose ruin he was so anxious to bring about?

This is the point at which we have been arriving. Nothing throughout the whole course of the fifteenth century, not even the political wisdom of the conqueror of Charles the Rash, succeeded in even temporarily checking the inordinate love of luxury that prevailed in France. Charles VIII. must therefore not be too severely judged for a pomp that he did not inaugurate, but merely kept up according to the usual custom of princes, and with the approbation of a section at least of his subjects. No doubt the first expedition he led to Italy that had such disastrous results, was an act of policy quite unworthy of the lessons bequeathed to him by his father. For all that, however, it is very certain that had Louis XI. himself been drawn into such a war in the land of art, he would, like his son, have been unable to resist the temptation of bringing back in his train, together with a booty of masterpieces, some of those artists who were true experts in magnificence, with the result that the Renaissance would have been dated from his reign.



## THE FOURTH CHAPTER

### THE RENAISSANCE

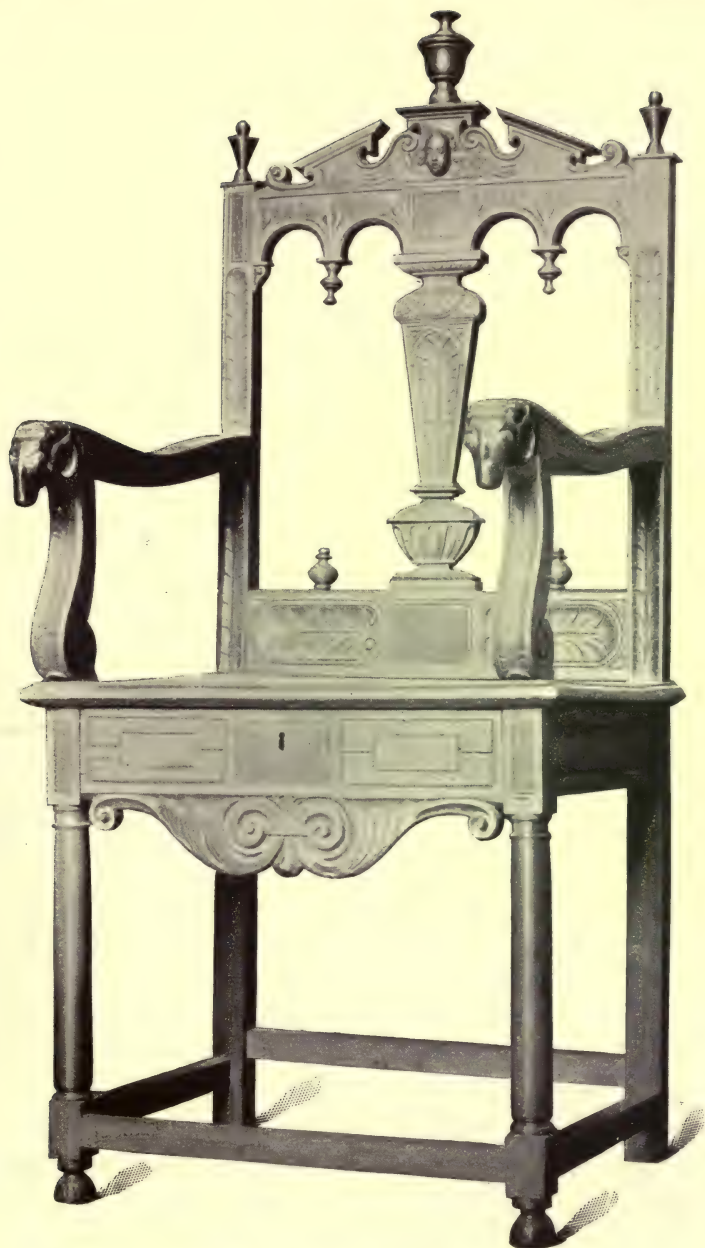


It is very much the fashion nowadays to deplore the fact that Charles VIII., previously imbued with the Romanesque spirit, should have been so excited by the perusal of the "Rosier des Guerres" as to provoke in 1494 the conflict between the French and the Italians which could but be the death-blow to the highest expression of French genius: \*Gothic art. This judgment, however, really proves a very superficial knowledge of facts. The Gothic art that gave birth to such splendid buildings as the cathedrals of Chartres, Notre Dame of Paris, Rheims, and Amiens was the result of a fervent faith which could not long be maintained at its original intensity, and had indeed already begun to decline at the end of the thirteenth century. The growing intricacy of the works we have been studying in chronological order, the decline in good taste everywhere noticeable, prove all too surely that at the date to which we have now come Gothic art was dying of natural causes; dying because it no longer had in itself the vital sap which

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was the essential principle of its life, so that it resembled a fruit-tree that is no longer pruned, the supports of which have given way, and which must eventually succumb beneath the weight of redundant foliage and sterile blossom. Weary of exercising their skill on lines of architecture that never varied, artists and artisans were ready to accept any innovation, no matter what its source. At the Court of Burgundy, for instance, as we have seen, the Flemings who brought with them nothing novel but certain mannerisms of their own, readily found pupils; whilst in the South, Italian ideas early filtered across the boundary, and King René sent from beyond the Alps for such artists as Laurana and Pietro da Milano to enrich his capital of Aix.

To resume: \*The Renaissance originated in France at the favourable moment for the rapid adoption of decorative motives founded on antique Latin models, that had already been  
\*freely drawn upon for some hundred years by Italian artists: decorative motives only, be it observed, for no new form of domestic furniture was introduced until a long time afterwards, everything of that kind still remaining what it was when sudden and frequent removals were the rule.) Moreover, French cabinet-makers never gave up the carving in relief of which they were such thorough



RENAISSANCE ARMCHAIR. Louvre Museum





## THE RENAISSANCE

masters, for the less familiar processes of painting on panels, nor did they adopt the use of coloured marqueterie, or of paste mouldings, in the style to which the names of *tarsia*, *intarsia pittoric*, and *certosina* were given in Italy.

\* Sudden as was the invasion of France by Italian design, it is doubtful whether the change was really effected all at once. As already stated, some works have been preserved in the purest Gothic style, that date from the first quarter of the sixteenth century, most of them in churches, for which the supple Florentine line did not appear sufficiently dignified to the artists who designed them and who were attached to old traditions. Leaving them aside, we will first study the examples in which the old and new styles jostle each other, and then those in which the pointed arch has completely disappeared, giving place to a purely Italian motive.

What may be called a classic type of the marriage of the two styles—which we must quote as a masterpiece of wood carving, though it leads us somewhat away from our subject—is the door of the church of Saint Sauveur at Aix in Provence, which dates from 1504, and on which, though the whole is evidently the work of one hand, niches with pointed arches in which stand

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the figures of prophets are separated by pilasters decorated with arabesques and the animals that symbolise the Evangelists. The two styles are naïvely used side by side, the artist having made no attempt to unite them by any transitional features, and the effect of the whole is charming. The same combination is met with in a pulpit of the church of Beaulieu les Loches, in which panels in the flamboyant Gothic and Italian styles alternate with each other. This little masterpiece was no doubt produced in the brilliant workshops on the Loire, whose talented owners were the first to learn the technical secrets of the craftsmen brought back with him from Italy by the victor of Fornova to his favourite Château of Amboise, and to win fresh inspiration from the works of art that formed part of the spoil he amassed in it. It is probable that the new arrivals themselves at first worked in the princely mansions of France, as was the custom in their own country, side by side with the carpenters of Amboise and Tours, who in 1493 received from the King a commission for a large number of benches, trestle-tables, dressers, wooden bedsteads and wooden chairs, to be covered with red leather. In any case the lessons the foreigners taught were very quickly learnt, for not a single Italian name occurs amongst those of the



RENAISSANCE CHAIR. Palace of Compiègne



RENAISSANCE CHAIR. Palace of Compiègne



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twenty-one cabinet-makers who a few years later executed by order of the noble Archbishop of Rouen, George of Amboise, and his nephew, the wood-work of the famous Château of Gaillon. Not a single piece of furniture that belonged to that residence has been preserved but a few wainscot panels now at Cluny and in the Abbey of St. Denis, the beauty of which would have been quite enough to prove what the grandeur of the whole work must have been, even if the accounts of the payments made for it were not accessible. Although of exclusively French manufacture, they are good examples of the blending of the Gothic and Italian styles.

M. Emile Molinier, who is one of the most learned and expert writers on these subjects, refers in his "Histoire générale des Arts appliqués à l'Industrie," apropos of the Château of Gaillon to certain Italian plaques and engravings, the motives of which were evidently reproduced by French artists in the decorative, and even in the monumental work, produced during this period. The double corbels introduced by Michelozzi above the gateway of the Palace of the Medici at Milan, were very possibly familiar to French cabinet-makers through Mantegna's engraving of the *Flagellation*; the dolphins that occur so frequently at

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Gaillon and at Cluny appear to have been borrowed from the frontispieces of such collections of engravings as the *St. Jerome* printed in Venice in 1498; the illustrations of the "*Strife of Love as seen in a Dream by Poliphilo*,"\* by Francesco Colonna, issued in the same town in 1499, seem to have suggested the idea of the siren and many other motives; and the dolphin rolling itself round an anchor introduced on the tomb of Guillaume Gouffier in the Chapelle d'Oiron is really nothing more than an imitation of the trade-mark of the great Venetian printer Aldus Manutius.

\* The easy transportation of such decorative details was not the only reason for the rapid propagation throughout France of the so-called antique style. It must be added that the cabinet-makers themselves were ready enough to travel alone or in groups from one town to another where much building was going on and good wages were paid. There they produced works which in their turn served as patterns to the native artists and were hawked about in other places. These facts, of which there are plenty of proofs, are

\* A facsimile of this rare and valuable book, of which but very few copies remain, was published in 1894 by Messrs. Methuen, under the original title, "*Poliphili Hypnerotomachia*," with a pamphlet giving its history.  
--TRANS.





RENAISSANCE DRESSER. Louvre Museum



## THE RENAISSANCE

enough to upset the ingenious theory evolved by certain learned writers, otherwise reliable enough, that it is possible to classify geographically the various centres of art production of the French Renaissance. We must give up the idea of being able to define the characteristics of a Norman school, a school of Champagne, of Auvergne, of the South, of Lyons, of Tours, of Burgundy, and so on. The truth is that the new style took possession at the beginning of the reign of Francis I. of all the provinces at once, appearing at first, as we have seen, side by side with the Gothic and then gradually ousting it. Prudence dictates the necessity of relegating to the first part of the sixteenth century all works in which any traces can still be made out of the old style, even if every detail of the construction be foreign, and then to consider those that are evidently entirely Italian in spirit. In both, whether produced in the North, the South, the East, or the West, identical motives are everywhere prevalent; such as candelabra, columns with floral capitals, figures in relief beneath a canopy of foliage and fruit, or a mere moulding known as a *chapeau de triomphe* or chaplet of victory, dolphins, arabesques of conventionalised flowers, and flat mouldings called *bandelettes*.

It was in a comparatively short time that

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Gothic design, already thoroughly outworn, merged itself in the graceful style borrowed from Italy. In the examples preserved, the progress year by year of the latter can be distinctly followed, traces of the pointed arch becoming rarer and rarer, taking refuge only, as it were, in the cornices or in the attenuated mouldings, and then finally disappearing. About the end of the reign of Francis I., therefore, the triumph of the style brought over from Italy may be said to have been complete, but in the very moment of victory it found itself transformed in the hands and at the initiative of French artists, and compelled to submit to the strenuous influence of their traditional taste, out of which resulted a national art of individual character, alike vigorous and versatile, known in history as the Henri II. style. We will consider that style in the next chapter. The "antique school," strictly so-called, has produced too many fine works to be dismissed in a few lines, in spite of those purists who choose to see in it nothing but the decadence, or, to be more accurate, the complete disappearance, of French genius.

The word decadence should really be replaced by that of evolution, for transition between two artistic systems, bearing witness to the intellectual as well as the æsthetic

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vigour of a nation, cannot be likened to a decline leading to ruin. Moreover, the evolution now to be considered was extremely brief, undeniably brilliant, and far more French than a mere cursory examination of external appearances would lead us to suppose. If the art that prevailed in Italy in the time of Francis I., such as the painted marqueterie and plaques, in which quantity excelled quality, be studied, it will be seen that the craftsmen of France did not really produce mere counterfeits of those designs, and that even when they borrowed motives, detail by detail, they assimilated them with a discretion and refined taste that really recalled the work of the Italians of the fifteenth rather than of the sixteenth century. Some writers who recognise this fact as we do, have not chosen to explain it in this simple manner, so glorious for French craftsmen, but make out that the works of this period of the Renaissance were actually produced by Italian artists. Of course we are unable to contradict these learned critics when they claim such an origin for the panels and marqueteries that adorn the chapel of the Château of La Bâtie en Forez, built by Claude d'Urfé, or the panels of the chapel and sacristy of the Château of Ecouen that are now at Chantilly, but it is very probable that these were all actually



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executed in Italy and brought over at immense expense by wealthy connoisseurs. The question becomes an even more delicate one when we have to deal with such works as the panels of the Château of Fontainebleau, of which it is true but a very small portion, badly restored some fifty years ago, now remains, but with which many old engravings have made us familiar. We read, indeed, in the "Comptes des Bâtiments du Roi" that French and Italian artists were at work at the same time at Fontainebleau, and it is significant that one of the latter, a certain Francisque Seibecq, called De Carpi, received the highest salary of them all. It is, however, permissible, as much of all this is pure hypothesis, to suggest that it is possible that this De Carpi was a kind of architect or director of the works, in the execution of which he took no actual share, especially as we know for certain that a great part of the wood-work was produced at Tours by Masters Aman and Antoine Les Bruns, who sent it to Fontainebleau in 1530. This hypothesis would apply equally well to the work in the Louvre and St. Germain-en-Laye royal *châteaux*, to which the cabinet-maker-in-ordinary of the King, Francisque de Carpi, was undoubtedly summoned, and perhaps also to that in the charming retreat of Anet, a few fragments of which are preserved in the Ecole







MISERERE STALL. Beginning of XVI Century. Abbey of S. Denis

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des Beaux Arts of Paris, and retain the impress of a double influence, for the best artisan in the employment of the King is sure to have been sent to his favourite Diana of Poitiers, Châtelaine of that gem of architecture.

If, however, in spite of the reasons we have urged against it, the belief is still retained that the remarkable decorations of these palaces were to a great extent the work of Italians who were living in France, no one will be disposed to deny the simple character of the chest in the Carnavalet Museum, see Plate XVIII., page 74. The boldness of the carving recalls the broad treatment of the best Gothic period, and there is no doubt that it was designed by a Frenchman of good taste. Of the *armoire*, too, of which we also give an illustration, the same thing may be affirmed, enriched as it is with groups of goddesses in landscape scenery, foliage and flowers, eagles and sirens set in a background of graceful, well-proportioned architecture, resembling Lombard damascening on Parisian armour. Lastly, as a final and clinching argument, have we not the fine doorway of the Cathedral of Beauvais? all the ornamentation of which is in the antique style, and the author of which we know to have been a true Frenchman, Jean le Pot, who has actually stamped his work with a souvenir of the old masters he would

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have been the last to disown, by representing Jerusalem as a Gothic church in one of his bas-reliefs.

The national art of France, then, continued its development without a break, like a strong chain some of the links of which were of gold whilst others were of alloy. The century we have just been considering is one of the latter, but if the metal was not quite pure, never was its workmanship more delicately skilful. The costly expeditions to Italy had as happy results for the cultivation of French taste and the refinement of French manners as had the Crusades in a more barbarous age. It was in the reign of Charles VIII., that the word "courtesy," derived from "court," first came into use, and that the nobles, back again from their warlike expeditions on the other side of the Alps, began to look upon military virtue, not, as did Charles the Rash, as skill in fleecing others, but as a pledge to keep the word once given, to be true to king and flag, to merit the title of a loyal servant, of a knight without fear and without reproach, won by Bayard under Louis XII. and Francis I. The moral progress of the aristocracy was reflected amongst the people, and resulted in the springing up of the *élite* cultivated class of the *bourgeoisie*. Mixing with Italian society



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had taught the lesson that talent should be honoured, however lowly the position of its owner. Francis I., a highly educated king, of artistic tastes, visited Leonardo da Vinci on his deathbed, delighted in the conversation of Guillaume Budé, provost of the merchants, who advised him to found, the College of the Three Languages, out of which grew the College of France, encouraged Robert Estienne to develop the art of printing, then recently discovered by Gutenberg, enriched Amyot, the translator of Plutarch, and protected with his powerful friendship the admirable audacity of Rabelais.

However foreign to our subject these considerations may appear, they are, in our opinion, indispensable to its complete comprehension, for they explain the promptitude with which the nation, flooded with so many new revelations, accepted an art suggestive of a refinement hitherto unknown. On the other hand, lavish display seemed to be more than ever a necessity even to commoners. In the reign of Louis XII. Charles Seyssel wrote: "Throughout the kingdom great buildings are being erected on every side, public as well as private, covered with gilding, not only on the wainscoting and the walls of the interior, but also on the outside, the roofs, the towers, and the statues; the houses are

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furnished, too, with all manner of costly things, such as were never seen before. Moreover, silver dishes are used by all classes to such an extent that it has been necessary to issue an order to check this superfluity"—it was annulled two years later on account of its uselessness—"for there is a certain set of people who will not be content unless their cups, goblets, ewers, and spoons are of silver at least."

What would the historian of Louis XII. have said if he could have seen what the luxury of France became under that monarch's successor! The Field of the Cloth of Gold, a city, enduring but for a day, on which the treasury of the kingdom was squandered; the Court of Fontainebleau, where the young Catherine of Medici, the daughter-in-law of the King, at the head of fifty ladies chosen for their beauty, organised incredibly lavish *fêtes*; and those other almost as luxurious courts such as that of the Marshal of St. André, who on his estate of Vallery surpassed even his sovereigns in the magnificence and beauty of his rare and exquisite furniture, or that of Bonnivet who had the weapons of all the soldiers of his army engraved and gilded!



CHEST. Beginning of XVI Century. Cluny Museum, Paris





## THE FIFTH CHAPTER

### HENRI II. AND THE SECOND HALF OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY



THE style which it has become customary to call that of Henri II., because it was inaugurated in the reign of that monarch, who was the son of Francis I., lasted until the beginning of the seventeenth century—that is to say, during the successive occupation of the throne by the four last princes of the house of Valois. It was but the final nationalisation of principles brought from Italy, the outcome of the genius of the great sculptors, and still more of the great architects, of the Renaissance. Rarely in the history of art did so sudden a change take place, or at least appear to take place. As we have already seen, scarcely had the Italian style attained the dominating position in which it often was difficult to distinguish between French and foreign work, before it was in its turn driven out by the springing up of a new growth full of sap, which took root and bore fruit upon the dying beauty of its predecessor, much as does a rose upon the wild briar on to which it is grafted.

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The men who rose up in response to the great thought movement of the Renaissance, encouraged by the royal patronage now accorded to art and to all intellectual work, were not likely to be content with servilely copying models originated by a people whose traditions and æsthetic requirements were quite unlike their own. The literary treasures of the antique world, dispersed after the fall of Constantinople and vulgarized by their reproduction through the newly discovered art of printing, would, of course, make a very different impression upon the creative imagination of Jean Cousin or Jean Goujon than they did on that of Donatello, Michael Angelo, Dello Delli or Andrea di Cosimo. With their chisel, these men created figures in stone which they presumed to be as classic as those shown them by Roman and Florentine artists, but which really, without resembling the old Latin models, were the expression of a truly French spirit. On the other hand, the architects of the first half of the sixteenth century—when the virile force of mediæval times was, as it were, becoming deteriorated by anæmia and a predilection for the excessive elegance borrowed from across the frontier—also looked upon antique art from a different point of view than that of the Italians. They meant to copy but they really





CARVED WOOD CHAIR. XVI Century.  
Belonging to M. Chabrière-Arlés



## THE HENRI II. STYLE

interpreted, and their hereditary sense of harmony and fitness led them to seek in the remembrance of long-banished buildings for models of furniture better adapted to the imagined surroundings of pagan emperors than were those of the Gothic period.

The result of what may be called this great latent activity was the successive appearance of a series of albums containing engravings of designs for monuments, furniture, and decorative sculpture, all inspired by antique work, but for all that marked by a curious originality. It was to these the craftsmen of every part of France simultaneously resorted, to gather together the elements of the new style known as that of Henri II. To encourage each designer whilst retaining his own individuality, to modify the drawings given to suit his special needs, was indeed the chief aim of those who issued these publications—an aim frankly stated on the covers of some of them.

The authors of these collections of engravings were a Parisian named Jacques Androuet du Cerceau and a Burgundian called Hugues Sambin, and as they published the results of their researches in the towns in which they lived, Paris and Dijon, it is easy to divide the immense quantities of furniture produced in France in the second half

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of the sixteenth century into two schools, that of the Ile de France, and that of Burgundy, inspired by those two artists. This will obviate the necessity of attempting to describe the work of the various provinces, the classification of which would be of very doubtful value, as the books of engravings circulated everywhere were used by everybody, and give an almost identical appearance to the products of widely separated districts.

Little is known of the life of Androuet du Cerceau, except that he was born about 1510, and travelled as a young man in Italy, as is proved by some drawings preserved at Munich representing designs for St. Peter's at Rome and the Palazzo Cancelleria, copies of antique architecture, such as the Thermæ of Diocletian, and reproductions of sketches by Bramante or his competitors, for that great architect was very much the fashion in Italy at that time. Du Cerceau did not hesitate later to issue to the public designs that were very evidently inspired by Bramante, giving to them antique titles, and thus leading his ignorant fellow countrymen to adopt them. His laudable intentions, however, go far to condone this piece of trickery, for, says his most appreciative biographer M. de Geymüller, it had a double purpose, "to make known the principles and forms of Italian art to

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BED OF DUKE ANTOINE DE LORRAINE. XVI Century.  
Nancy Museum



## THE HENRI II. STYLE

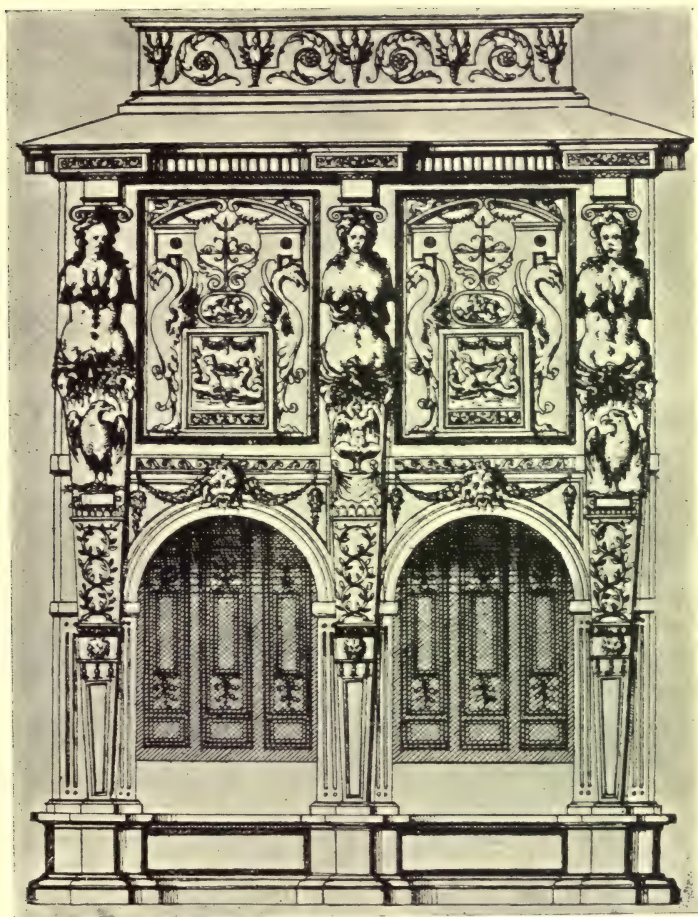
all who adopted professions in France connected with the fine arts, or industrial art, as we should say nowadays, and to set his country free from the necessity of having recourse to foreign artists." He himself practised architecture, and amongst other buildings designed the Château of Montargis, belonging to Renée of Ferrara, and rebuilt the choir of the Church of the Madeleine in the same town. After publishing a collection of engravings—the titles of which indicate clearly enough the professions of those for whom they were intended, such as the "Book of Mathematical Implements," "The Book of Architecture, with Fifty Designs for Different Buildings," "The Book of Designs for Country Houses," "The Most Excellent Buildings of France," Boundary Statues, Orders, Escutcheons, Designs for Trophies, Arabesques, &c.—he had an album printed containing 71 designs for furniture, including 21 cabinets or dressers, 24 tables, a choir-stall, 2 doors, 8 beds, 2 brackets, 1 panel, 1 overmantel, 3 terminals, and 8 socles or pedestals. The complicated prodigality of lines and ornaments in these designs is perfectly astonishing, and arouses a doubt as to whether it would be possible to reproduce them exactly; but this was evidently not the intention of the author, as proved by the works executed

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during and after his time. All he wished was that his book should be, so to speak, a mine of ideas, from which craftsmen might borrow architectural combinations and decorative motives, to be arranged according to their own individual taste. Hence the overloading of every engraving with superfluous detail, which no one, we should imagine, would be so unreasonable as to attempt to copy servilely.

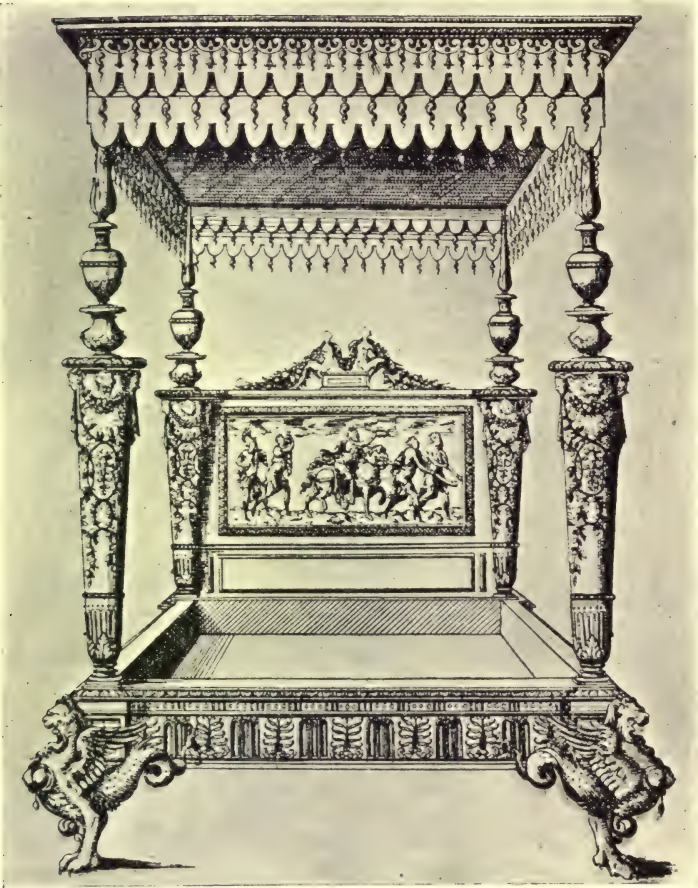
The examples we give of engravings by Du Cerceau, and the reproductions of designs for furniture inspired by him, will do more to enlighten the reader than pages of description of those ornate works. We will, therefore, content ourselves with naming some of the general principles of the master—principles adopted by his followers, and characteristic of the Henri II. style. The *armoires* generally have four folding-doors, two above and two below, separated from each other by pilasters surmounted with figures and greatly resembling an architectural façade, an effect sometimes increased by the addition of niches containing statuettes. The dressers are of three kinds—the first, a chest with folding-doors, is set up as in the old French style on a hollow base and finished off at the top with some architectural ornamentation; the second is divided into two compartments, both open at the back,

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DRESSER. After an engraving by Jacques Androuet du Cerceau





BED. After an engraving by Jacques Androuet du Cerceau



## THE HENRI II. STYLE

so that all the decoration there is is on the columns or the frieze; the third has three such open compartments. The beds are in two styles—some, of rectangular shape, have a so-called *dossier*, four balusters supporting a daïs, and feet carved to represent griffins or chimærae; others, shaped like flat-bottomed boats, are narrower at the feet than at the head, they have a *dossier* and three balusters to uphold the daïs, two at the head and one at the foot, representing a man or woman standing upright, the whole resting on a very lofty pedestal resembling the letter T. The tables are round or rectangular, but no examples of the former have come down to us; engravings in the "Album," however, represent them as upheld by two fan-shaped feet, the rays of the fans forming a star, the centre of the point of intersection being hollowed out to receive an ornament in relief, such as a vase or a palmette. A unique example of a round table is one with one foot only, carved into a succession of bulbs one above the other, which open out into coiling serpents, running beneath the top of the table so as to support it, whilst at the base is a symmetrical row of tortoises. Angular tables after Du Cerceau's designs are often met with. They generally have two fan-shaped supports upholding the two ends of the table, or, to be more correct, of the inlaid

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or beaded cincture that leads up to it, and the narrow bases of the feet rest upon patens connected by traverses, from which spring pillars and arches, or intersecting rails, which add to the strength of the table—the lavishness of the decoration culminating in the supports, in which the designer gave the rein to his imagination.

Hugues Sambin, some ten years younger than Du Cerceau, was the son of a carpenter, and became a member of the Corporation in 1549. That he rose rapidly through his skill as an engineer and grip of the art of architecture, is proved by reliable documents stating that in 1558 he had charge of the "artillery" at Dijon, where he resided, that in 1560 he regulated the course of the river Suzon, was concerned in the supply of water for the public fountains of that town, was employed in 1572 by Léonor Chabot, Grand Equerry of France, to decorate his *château* at Pagny, superintended from 1574 to 1582 the works of the most important buildings of Dijon, the Palais de Justice, and Chambre des Requêtes, the walls of the fortifications and a communal building, returning at the latter date to his original profession, for he was the author of the exquisite sculptures of the choir-screen of the chapel of the Palais de Justice, those of the door of the Archives, and also

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CUPBOARD. By Hugues Sambin. Middle of XVI Century.  
Arconati-Visconti Collection





## THE HENRI II. STYLE

probably of the outer entrance. Before his death, in 1602, this indefatigable and gifted artist designed the rood-loft of the Church of Dôle, and superintended the works of defence at Salins. Between whiles he produced an album of designs for Caryatides, published a series of engravings under the title of "*Œuvre de la diversité des termes dont on use en architecture*," and executed a number of pieces of furniture, whilst he superintended the production of many others.

In these minor works the Burgundian artist gave proof of a very prolific and powerful imagination. He lavished carvings of figures, fruit, and foliage on the surface of the wood with a view to giving a general impression of richness, whilst Du Cerceau gave more attention to grace of line, and relied for effect chiefly upon the wealth of beautiful, but often minute detail. The former delighted in carving lions' heads, eagles with mighty wings, voluptuous women, and muscular satyrs with merry faces. The latter was a fervent admirer of the long-limbed, elegant-looking goddesses which Jean Goujon borrowed from the Italian artists who worked at Fontainebleau, and which became widely popular through the work of the school that took its name from this favourite residence of Francis I. and Henri II. Moreover,

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whereas the Parisian master set the example of a French modification of Italian motives, to the Burgundian is due the credit of encouraging his disciples in a frank audacity and bold interpretation of those motives which really resulted in a revival of the beautiful craft of the cabinet-makers of the great mediæval period. In the dressers made in the reign of Henri IV. we see the final collapse of the school of Du Cerceau but a few years after the death of the founder of the Ile de France school, whereas in the so-called Louis XIV. style can be traced its derivation from the true Gallic art originated by the architect-craftsman of Dijon.

The Museum of Besançon owns two pieces of furniture that are supposed to be the actual work of Hugues Sambin—a table and an *armoire*. Although the design is far more complicated than that of the door of the Archives or the choir-screen of the chapel of the Palais de Justice at Dijon, the authenticity of which is fully established, these works were certainly either executed by him, or at least, which is much the same thing, produced after his designs under his superintendence, so that we feel justified in briefly describing them as typical examples of the Burgundian style. The master was, it is well known, at Besançon in 1581, and took up his residence with a



CUPBOARD. Middle of XVI Century







SIDEBOARD. Epoch Francis I. Cluny Museum





PANEL OF CUPBOARD. School of Hugues Sambin. Middle of XVI Century. Boy Collection





## THE HENRI II. STYLE

carpenter and painter belonging to the Gauthiot d'Ancier family. Indeed, the two pieces of furniture in question figure in the inventory of that house, and the *armoire* bears the date 1581. The table is upheld by two fan-shaped supports, the central portion of which is a terminal ending in the head of a grinning satyr, whilst the sides are two volutes ending at the bottom in lion's claws and at the top in rams' heads, rather clumsy for the size of the table, but well carved; the massive rests are decorated with foliage, and the edge of the table with carved ornamentation. The *armoire* is, perhaps, unique amongst the furniture of the second half of the Renaissance, on account of its complicated structure, although simplicity was never a characteristic of that time. It bears some resemblance to a dresser by a pediment upholding the central portion, which is of semi-circular form, and is further supported by brackets jutting out from a single console, the base of which now represents a chimæra that replaces a "satyr holding a cow-herd's horn," referred to in the old inventory; on either side is a two-storied wardrobe, separated by a drawer. Architectural motives are carved along the top, and on a pediment upheld by female figures are the arms of the Gauthiot family, and a bas-relief of various trophies. To wind

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up a description that may serve to give some idea of the lavishness of Burgundian ornament we may add that on the front, which is divided by columns, and along the top of the *armoire* eight mythological figures, representing Lucretia, Mercury, Flora, Ceres, Pan, Envy, Apollo, and Orpheus, are painted in cameo picked out with gold.

As we have had occasion to refer to paintings on the work of Sambin, we must warn our readers that the impression produced at the present day by furniture of earlier date than the seventeenth century with what may be called the beautiful patina of the old wood, polished by the action of time till it looks like antique bronze, is quite unlike what it was in mediæval and Renaissance times. There is no doubt that all these pieces of furniture were originally covered with paintings which would have seemed garish in modern rooms. But before we criticise this vanished fashion we must bear in mind that the way of looking at things differs very much at different periods—a fact that should never be lost sight of in dealing with the art of the past. The Greeks, for instance, to quote but one example, painted the marbles of Phidias, and indeed all their sculptures, with purely conventional colours. Moreover, it must be remembered that in old France, rooms were very large and

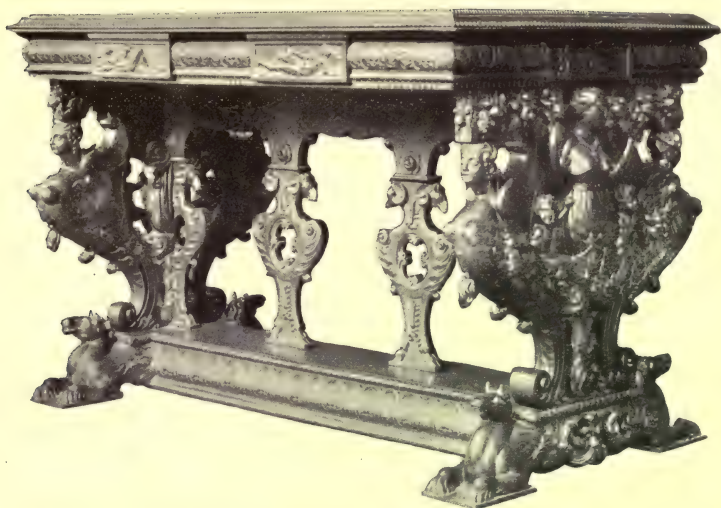


TABLE. Second half of XVI Century. School of Hugues Sambin



CHEST. Middle of XVI Century. Carnavalet Museum, Paris





## THE HENRI II. STYLE

scantily furnished, whilst the walls were hung with tapestries of gorgeous colouring, so that if the natural colour of the wood of the sideboards, wardrobes, and tables, the dark shining tones of which we now admire so much, had been left untouched, the effect would have been cold and gloomy. We give a reproduction of an *armoïre* belonging to Mme. la Comtesse Arconati-Visconti, which is specially valuable because it retains traces of painting and gilding that leave no doubt as to the brilliancy of the colours used to embellish the work of cabinet-makers.

We will not pause long over the remarkable personalities of Du Cerceau and Sambin, who were really great enough to dominate half a century. The illustrations accompanying our remarks will do more to bring out the strength of their influence than the descriptions we have felt bound to give, and our necessarily arbitrary classification of a subject that has already been treated by many others.

Simultaneously with the engravings of these two masters, many drawings, some of which have been preserved, were circulated in the *ateliers* and elsewhere throughout the whole of France. Some few, and those by no means the least artistic, were the work of their disciples. The name of one only has

## FRENCH FURNITURE

come down to us, that of Etienne de l'Auln, who worked chiefly in the reign of Henri IV. ; but now and then part of some good design happened to fall into the hands of a clever artist with little imagination, who would simply content himself with reproducing it exactly on all the panels of some piece of furniture. This was the case with one of the best decorated *armoires* of the end of the sixteenth century which passed from the Spitzer to the Salting collection, and has on each of its folding-doors a carving of the antique Laocoön, the pose being simply reversed.

In some few examples that have been preserved it is very evident that the artists responsible took their decorative motives from the Dijon and Paris drawings they chanced to come across, combining sometimes, for instance, the Dianas of Jean Goujon with grinning satyrs. It was inevitable that this fusion of the two schools should take place, and the fact does not militate in the least against the classification we have adopted. A good example of this composite style is a dresser that belonged to the Soulages collection, and is now in the South Kensington Museum. It dates from the very end of the sixteenth century, and in it will be recognised chimærae copied from Du Cerceau,



DRESSER. Second half of XVI Century. School of Du Cerceau



TABLE. Second half of XVI Century. School of Hugues Sambin.  
Dijon Museum



CHEST. Second half of XVI Century. Louvre Museum



## THE HENRI II. STYLE

female forms borrowed from Hugues Sambin combined with a figure of Justice inspired by some German medal. It was this combination of motives in a single work, the reason for which was not at first detected by provincial scholars, that led to the illusion of there having been some great schools in Southern France that flourished independently of those in the North. This very dresser at South Kensington is indeed quoted as one of the proofs of the ingenuity of the school of Languedoc, or rather of Toulouse, where a certain talented cabinet-maker, Nicolas Bachelier, rose into notice, who, like Du Cerceau, travelled in Italy as a young man, and, like Sambin, was an engineer, architect, sculptor, and designer of furniture. He made the plans of the *châteaux* of Assier and Montal, now destroyed, began the bridge of Saint Subra at Toulouse, designed and executed the tomb of Galiot de Genouilhac, Governor of Languedoc, and is credited with having been the sculptor of the main doorway of the church of Saint Saturnin at Toulouse, of the choir-screen of the Cathedral of Rodez, of an open-work stone screen in the chapel of Saint Sepulcre, and with having built several private houses in his native city, and produced also a quantity of furniture. Amongst the last were the choir-stalls of St. Saturnin, specially

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celebrated because one of the *misereres* represents Calvin—who has a pig's head—preaching. We have already shown that the originality of this master, and of the Languedoc artisans who followed him, will not stand the test of serious examination. It is, however, only fair to add that they were inspired by other artists as well as those of the North, for they knew the work of the Spanish, and also of the Flemish masters. The latter were the subjects of “the most Catholic King,” and were especially in repute and much copied in the beginning of the seventeenth century—that is to say, at a time when not only Languedoc but the whole of France were more or less impregnated by the taste of their neighbours in the North, on whose influence we shall dwell more at length in our next chapter.

The impression resulting from an examination of all this furniture of complicated structure and inordinate decoration, dating from the second part of the sixteenth century, is very much the same as that produced through studying the history of the manners of the time. French life under Henri II., Charles IX., and Henri III., all semi-Italian princes, dominated by their talented mother the Florentine Catherine de Medici, was an extraordinary mixture of terror and luxury,





DRESSER. Second half of XVI Century. Garde Meuble National, Paris



## THE HENRI II. STYLE

for in the midst of the horrible butchery of the religious wars, when such notorious crimes as the assassination of Condé at Jarnac, of Guise at Blois, and Coligny at Paris, were committed, luxury of the most effeminate type prevailed at the court of the last kings of the house of Valois. In this connection should be read Pierre de l'Estoile's description of the wedding of the Duc de Joyeuse, the festivities at the celebration of which cost the King twelve hundred thousand crowns, and Michel de Castelnau's account of the *fêtes* held by Catherine de Medici, at which sirens haunted the water-channels of Fontainebleau, and a wooded island was improvised to receive the Queen of Spain, who was escorted to it by the French Court on a fleet of magnificent boats followed by musicians and singers dressed as Tritons! Private individuals followed the noble example set by these prodigal gallants. Cardinal du Bellay, Ambassador at Rome, gave his guests at a banquet their choice of one thousand dishes of fish, and fifteen hundred of baked meats, and this was but a poor feast compared with the collation spread by the municipality of Paris for the wife of Charles IX., at which the *entremet* consisted of a presentation in sugar of the whole history of Minerva, from the moment when she issued in complete armour

## FRENCH FURNITURE

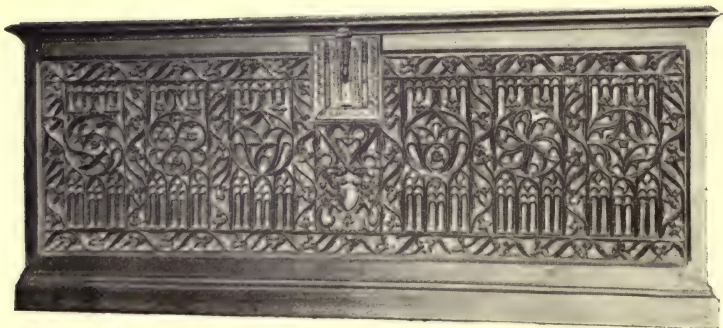
from the brain of Jupiter to that when she brought Perseus, slayer of the Gorgon, mounted on Pegasus, back to Athens, thus symbolising "the discomfiture of the enemies, past and future, of the King, overwhelmed by his magnificence and by his success in every enterprise through following the counsels of his Minerva."

This extravagant spirit was reflected in the domestic furniture of the home by the excess of ornamentation lavished upon it, such as volutes, flowers, and foliage, nymphs, dryads, and fauns. Everything must be alike costly and distorted, and for the sake of this an amount of constraint and discomfort was endured, very significant of a robustness of physique of which there is plenty of proof in the sanguinary exploits of Montluc, the Baron des Adrets, François de Guise, and the Valois princes themselves. If we are appalled at the martyrdom endured by the wearers of the huge, though dainty starched ruffs enclosing the throat as in a vice, the bodices with steel braces for drawing back the shoulders so as to give prominence to the bust, and the weight of the robes stretched at the hips over regular armour made by the blacksmith, we are no less astonished at the idea of any rest being obtained on chairs, the straw cushions of which did little to lessen





DRESSER. Second half of XVI Century. Louvre Museum



CHEST. End of XVI Century. Louvre Museum



## THE HENRI II. STYLE

their hardness, or in beds that could only be climbed into with difficulty, and bristled with balusters and posts, or caryatides, as provocative of night-mare as were the monsters that served as their pedestals.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY  
BEFORE THE ACCESSION OF  
LOUIS XIV



PEAKING generally, two-thirds of the seventeenth century may be said to have been taken up in a laborious effort on the part of French artists to assimilate all the foreign decorative styles of the time, and to evolve from them a definitely national style, which won for Louis XIV. more truly than did any historical event, the honour of giving his name to the whole epoch.

During the reigns of Henri IV. and Louis XIII. it seemed as if the æsthetic feeling of the whole country was becoming ever more and more tainted by the influence of the foreign products that crossed the frontier, and that the effeminate mannerism of the Court of Henri III. had finally discouraged original effort on the part of French craftsmen. Italian work was in special favour, as was but natural, in view of the marriage of the new King to a Medici, who, of course, attracted her fellow countrymen to her Court ; but Spanish artists were also thought highly



CHAIR. Louis XIII. Cluny Museum





## FOREIGN INFLUENCE

of, and the Ambassador from Spain exercised a very powerful influence over the narrow-minded Queen, whilst under pretext of aiding the Catholics in the religious wars Spanish troops were poured into the country. Nor were Flanders, Germany—whence came the piece of furniture presented by the City of Paris in 1619 to Talon, the first Avocat-Général of the Parlement—Portugal, or the Low Countries neglected. The last-named were themselves already imbued with Italian ideas, and, almost simultaneously with France, they had endeavoured to stamp them with their own individuality—but, it must be added, without the genius of a Du Cerceau or a Sambin to aid them. In a word, France seemed in danger of drifting into a decadence of the worst type, no longer drawing her inspiration direct from Italy, but aimlessly vacillating between this style and that, becoming ever more and more anæmic and emasculated. Henri IV., a man of no little intelligence, could not fail to notice the discouragement under which the artists of his country laboured, and he set to work to find a remedy for it, hitting on one which seemed likely to hasten the final catastrophe, for he sent craftsmen to Holland to study the process of carving in ebony, and on their return installed them in the Grand Gallery of the

## FRENCH FURNITURE

Louvre, side by side with foreigners. This example was followed by his son, for the accounts of Louis XIII. reveal the fact that even in his palace the art of decoration was taught by masters—such as the German Hanemann, the Fleming Stabre, and the Swiss Pierre Boulle—of every nationality except Italian.

Before proving that, in spite of this invasion of France by foreign styles, she did succeed in bringing about a new manifestation of her own individual genius, secretly, as it were, turning to account the superabundant models at her disposal by her recognition of their defects, it is necessary for us to define the characteristics of those styles and of those models.

We repeat that for more than a century and a half Italy had never ceased to exercise an influence upon her neighbour, and the accession of a second Medici had certainly not tended to weaken that influence. Moreover, in 1603 certain allies, even more important than the Queen herself and her Florentine Court, came to its support, for in that year the Jesuits, who had been expelled from France in 1595, were recalled. Their religious zeal led them to begin at once to build colleges and churches on every side, and they chose as director-general of these



ARMCHAIR. Epoch Louis XIII. Cluny Museum



CHAIR. Epoch Louis XIII. Palace of Elysée



## FOREIGN INFLUENCE

works the so-called "temporal coadjutor," Etienne Martellange, who had passed the time of the exile of the Congregation at Rome, where he had acquired a remarkable knowledge of the science of architecture, which made up to some extent for his want of imagination and very inferior taste. For thirty years he was engaged in raising up all over France pretentious structures, cold and correct, but uninteresting, in the pseudo-classic Roman style, inaugurating in building as in furniture the kind of thing too well known under the name of the Jesuit style. Another incidental and less accidental reason for the persistence of Italianism in domestic furniture was the rage for cabinets which first set in during the reign of Henri III.

Strictly speaking, a cabinet is nothing more than an ordinary chest placed upon a stand, opening, not, as at first, at the top, but with one or more folding-doors on one side, with drawers inside. It may really be called an *armoire de luxe* for keeping valuable articles, and for this reason the makers delighted in decorating it as lavishly as possible. There is no doubt that the cabinet is of Oriental origin, but it is difficult to decide whether it was first used in Europe, in Spain or in Venice. However that may be, it was Italian artists who chiefly excelled in the con-

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struction, and still more in the decoration, of cabinets, with the result that from the end of the sixteenth century the demand for those exported from the Peninsula became immense. Italian manufacturers used for them costly exotic woods, which they inlaid with coloured marqueterie, ivory, shells, mother-of-pearl, &c., all enriched with jewellery. The new impulse given by such delicate decorative work to artisans and craftsmen will be recognised at once. The use of bronze in the ornamentation of French furniture, of which so many examples exist, was without doubt suggested by the delightful combinations of gold and silver designed by cabinet-makers on the other side of the Alps. The use of tortoise-shell plaques, in which the Boulles excelled, was also evidently suggested by the mosaics which Florentine artists began in the middle of the sixteenth century to work into their little cabinets and the tops of their tables. Strange to say, at the beginning of the century an incomprehensible and melancholy whim led Northern craftsmen to use ebony, originally a mere accessory of marqueterie, as the material for the whole of the cabinets made by them without anything to relieve it, and it was to study this kind of work that Henri IV. sent some carefully selected workmen to Holland, assigning to them quarters in the

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EBONY CHEST. Epoch Louis XIII. Palace of Fontainebleau



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Louvre on their return, and dubbing them *menuisiers en ébène*, which is the origin of the name of "ebenistes," given to-day to makers of furniture of every kind. A great many Italian cabinets have been preserved in France, one of which in the Cluny Museum may be quoted as a typical example. It is supposed to have belonged to Maria Gonzaga, Queen of Poland, and is of very complicated structure, so overladen with all manner of ornamentation, inlaid and *appliqué* in metal and other materials, that it is really less like a work of art than a masterpiece in the sense understood by municipal juries—that is to say, an accumulation of tricks of various trades. It is easy to imagine what kind of technical lessons such pieces of work would give to the artisans of other countries! The French got from it not only the idea to which we have already referred of using gilded bronze, but also of inlaying gold and silver in iron—a process known as damascening, such as was employed, for instance, in a large pier-glass in the South Kensington Museum.

Spain, which ever since the fifteenth century had supplied France with quantities of the painted and gilded leather hangings for rooms known as *guadamacillas*, now began to export also numerous cabinets, that can easily

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be identified by their cubic shape and the open-work metal plaques with which they were decorated in accordance with Moorish traditions. These pieces of furniture, of which the best existing examples are at South Kensington, were formerly known as *varguenos*, for the chief place of manufacture was Varguo, in the province of Toledo. Inlaid wood, ivory, or painted bone are the only decorations employed. These cabinets do not really seem to have had any direct share in the evolution of the Louis XIV. style, in spite of the favour they enjoyed for a time. It was, indeed, rather through their tributary province of Flanders, which had, however, already been brought under Italian influence, that Spanish craftsmen produced any effect upon those of France. Moreover, the exports from Portugal on the other side of the Pyrenees were looked upon as costly curiosities rather than models to be imitated; the variety of choice woods brought to Lisbon for the manufacture of furniture, the suitability of Asiatic materials, such as tortoiseshell and mother-of-pearl, for inlaid work, were, of course, at first extremely attractive to Italian craftsmen, enamoured as they were of the mosaic marquetry, known as *tarsia*, and it is possible that it was through these latter that a few indications of the Portuguese style

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may have become incorporated in that which we are about to study.

Cabinets of German fabrication were celebrated in Europe in the first years of the seventeenth century. We have already noted how the municipality of Paris, rich though it was in good craftsmen of its own, chose to purchase a famous German piece of furniture for a ceremonial gift. The merit of these works did not, however, consist in the originality of their structure, which was simply copied from the Italian style, nor in the novelty of the processes of decoration employed, for the use of amber in certain examples was the only innovation, but in the minute and scrupulous care with which every detail was executed. This unwearying patience, alike the distinctive merit and defect of the Teutonic character, which makes Germany the home *par excellence* of archæologists and theoretical philosophers, is displayed in the enormous output of work by an immense number of craftsmen, working chiefly at Nuremberg and Augsburg. In 1616 the ebenist Ulrich Baumgarter was commanded by the Duke of Pomerania to make a cabinet which it took him five years to produce—with the aid of the architect-painter Philippe Hainofer, and three other painters, a sculptor, an enamellist, six jewellers, two clock-makers,



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an organ-maker, a mechanician, a modeller in wax, a specialist in making cabinets, an engraver in metal, a chaser of precious stones, a turner, a binder, two scabbard-makers, and two locksmiths. The work is now in the Museum of Industrial Art at Berlin; the execution is perfect, but no one will be surprised when we add that it is also too complicated and heavy, and as a whole far from artistic. Our only reason for dwelling on it at length is to give an idea of the technical and intellectual characteristics contributed to the revival of the French school by the numerous German craftsmen who crossed the Rhine.

Holland, especially what were then its Flemish provinces, sent to France very nearly as many skilled craftsmen as Germany. Prosperity had returned to the districts long terrorised by the government of the Duke of Alva, and Antwerp became the headquarters of the manufactures of the country. In many cases it was impossible to distinguish between the works exported from the North and those produced in the South, so great was the skill with which Flemish artisans assimilated Italian processes. It was, however, of course impossible for a land owning so many artists of talent—indeed of genius, for Rubens was then flourishing—to be content with plagia-

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EBONY CHEST. Beginning of XVII Century. Cluny Museum .



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risms of foreign designs for furniture. As a matter of fact, we find in cabinets executed under the influence of such men as De Vriendt, surnamed Floris, the Francks, the Breughels, and De Vos not only mosaics in the Florentine style, and decorations copied from Correggio's designs, but paintings by native artists, marquetry, in which the tulip, cultivated with such loving care in the North, is the prevailing motive, and lastly, representations engraved in ebony of contemporaries of the craftsmen.

After this rapid review of the extraordinarily prolific foreign output, and the raids made on France by it from every side, the danger of being swamped run by French individuality will readily be understood. Those, indeed, whose talent or preponderating influence ought to have made them the right persons to defend it were the first unconsciously to betray it. Martellange of Lyons, endowed alike with talent and with wealth, devoted all his energies, as we have seen, to disseminating yet more widely depraved Italian taste. Henri IV. was, it is true, inspired with the noble and fitting ambition of protecting art at his own Court, for, as he wrote in 1608, "amongst the infinite blessings resulting from peace, that of the cultivation of the arts, which always

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flourish through its influence, is by no means the least." But who was the first to whom he offered hospitality? A Fleming, Laurent Stabre. Louis XIII. inherited the ideas and tastes of his father. During his reign a kind of Babel prevailed in the long *galerie* of the Louvre, in which were to be heard all the dialects of Europe, and where French artists were permeated with foreign influence. Richelieu, keen-sighted though he generally was, shared the ideas of his sovereign, and had a mosaic table made at Florence, which is now in the Louvre Museum, was valued by La Fontaine at the exaggerated price of nine hundred thousand livres, and in which the revolutionary delegate Guitton-Morvaux pretended in 1794 that he recognised the precious stones filched from the shrines of the Abbey of St. Denis. Under Richelieu, and, subsequently, under Mazarin, the palace was filled with Italian productions. The latter installed in it the Dutch ebenist Pieter Golle, or Goller, and got the King to take into his service his own fellow countrymen Domenico Cucci, Filippo Caffieri, Francesco Bordoni, Fernando and Horatio Migliorini, Luigi Giacetti, Branchi, and others.

It really seemed at this moment as if the fires of French art, lit perhaps a thousand years before, were about to be extinguished a



## ABRAHAM BOSSE

second time by the Latin genius ! But this was not to be. National taste survived ; slowly but rationally it was re-evolved, modifying without any sudden or inharmonious transitions the fashions of ancestral times, and at the same time selecting and assimilating the best of the novel ideas presented to it. It is modest, but irresistible, for it has the majority on its side. It reflects the feelings of millions of humble souls, bound by family ties, who honour the memory of their fathers, and who, owning few things of value, give all the more affection to their unpretending furniture.

A certain man who lived at this time constituted himself the recorder of the fashions that prevailed in French homes, and that in a style most interesting from our point of view, for he chose engraving instead of writing as his medium of expression. His name was Abraham Bosse ; he was the son of a merchant of Tours, and he was a member of the Calvinist sect, practising his religion, however, without prudery, if we may judge him by the Gallic humour characterising his engravings in the style of Jacques Callot and his pupil Jean de Saint-Igny. The earliest of these engravings were published in 1622, and were succeeded during some forty years by numerous series, under various titles, such as the " Jardin de la

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noblesse française," "Figures au naturel tant des vêtements que des postures des gardes françaises du Roi très Chrétien," "Mariage à la Ville," "Mariage à la Campagne," "L'enfant prodigue," "Lazare et le mauvais riche," "Les vierges sages et les vierges folles," "Cris de Paris, Métiers," "Galleries du Palais," "Œuvres de Charité," &c. Even the plates illustrating Biblical scenes are little pictures of life in the seventeenth century, taken direct from nature with a truthfulness and simplicity recalling the work of the Dutchmen Vermeer, Terborch, or Van Ostade. The men are seen going about in doublets, with shoulder knots and full trunk hose, the women in very wide petticoats and low bodices, even in the gardens adorned with summer-houses, rock-work grottoes, and trees trimmed into pyramids, as well as in rooms betraying more or less clearly a certain reminiscence of the Henri II. style. Although we see that this sort of decoration became more complicated in those specimens of *aristocratic* furniture—now preserved in museums—which were made under Louis XIII., it was, on the contrary, greatly simplified by the taste of the *bourgeoisie*. The ever-increasing rarity of those good carvers on wood who had been supplanted by workers in mosaic and mar-





CHEST OF DRAWERS of Louis XIV at Versailles; attributed to Charles Boulle. Bibliothèque Mazarin



CHEST. Epoch Louis XIV. Palace of Versailles



## ABRAHAM BOSSE

quetry in the Italian manner made it the more necessary, if the old forms were not to be given up, to have recourse to turners. The complicated system of columns upholding the square tables of Du Cerceau were replaced by spiral supports. It was much the same with ordinary chairs and arm-chairs, the chisel was only used on the top and posts of the *dossier* and on the most important of the rails, sometimes not even on them. Now for the first time the seat is to a certain extent comfortable, the beautiful carvings in relief that made it impossible to rest the shoulders have disappeared, as have also the movable cushions, which were quite insufficient to mitigate the hardness of the wood. Henceforth the seats are covered with cane, cloth, or stuffed leather, firmly fastened on to the structure. Moreover, the whole room is draped and the new woodwork disguised, as it has no longer a decorative object, with curtains and carpets. Some of Bosse's engravings represent comfortable rooms in which the bed and the table appear merely as two irregular cubes, so closely are they covered over down to the very ground. The bed from the Château of Effiat in the Cluny Museum gives something of the impression of a miniature apartment within a room. This fancy led to the evolution of the

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alcove, a regular wardrobe-like room, the only open side of which was sometimes provided with actual doors, traces of which remain in most French houses that are more than a hundred years old. It was in such alcoves that, in accordance with the most singular of all the strange fashions we have so far passed in review, ladies—imitating the so-called *Précieuses* of the Hôtel Rambouillet—used to hold receptions as well as to sleep. Lying full length outside, or even sometimes inside, the bed in elegant *déshabille*, and with the light filtering through skilfully adjusted curtains, they would make their friends sit down in the *ruelle*, or narrow passage between the bed and the wall. This fashion prevailed throughout the whole of the reign of Louis XIV.

Furniture, as we have seen, became greatly simplified amongst the middle classes, and the loss so far as art was concerned was made up for by increase of comfort. It appears to us quite easy to account for this double evolution, which reached its fullest development in the second quarter of the seventeenth century. It cannot be denied that the influence of Calvinism had something to do with it; the formality and coldness of domestic decoration in the reign of Henri IV. succeeded too rapidly the brilliant and affected



CUPBOARD. By Charles Cressent. Epoch Régence. Chappey Collection







COMMODE OF THE REGENCY PERIOD. By Charles Cressent.  
Wallace Collection



GILDED RÉGENCE TABLE. Collection of Mme Brach

PLATE XXXV



LARGE RÉGENCE DESK. Louvre Museum





CHEST OF DRAWERS Epoch Régence. In the Bishop's residence at Meaux



TABLE. Epoch Régence Period. Retrospective Exhibition, Paris



## INFLUENCE OF PROTESTANTISM

style that prevailed under his predecessor, for it to be possible to fail to recognise how important was the influence over popular customs of the triumph of a prince who remained a Huguenot behind the Catholicism he assumed, because "a kingdom is worth more than a Mass." The Bearnais monarch was popular, he was beloved, and as a result he was imitated. Now, like his comrades in the religious wars, he carried contempt for show to such an extent as to take a positive pride in exaggerated simplicity. The lower classes liked to recall the fact that on his entry into Paris the sovereign only had five pocket-handkerchiefs and a dozen shirts in very bad condition, and that his best costume consisted of a doublet of white satin, a black cloak, and a plumed hat which he wore both on the occasion of his solemn recantation of Protestantism, as well as for the ceremony of coronation, and, indeed, a hundred other familiar anecdotes, such as that of his having received the Spanish Ambassador on all fours with his children riding on his back. All this is very much in the reformist spirit of the time, and explains the taste for the severe style of Protestant Holland, and also the fact that Henri IV.'s first act as an art patron was to send his best artisans to the Dutch school. The very evident resemblance in interior decoration in the two countries, Holland and

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France, which can easily be illustrated by a comparison between the work of Gerard Terborch and Abraham Bosse, is the result, it appears to us, of the impulse given by a king whom all his subjects took for their example.

It has been said that the fashion of entirely covering furniture with drapery was but a revival and development of an Italian custom of the fifteenth century. This is going very far afield to seek an explanation, and needlessly to exaggerate the artistic domination of Italy, that was already great enough. She may be credited with the first use of bed draperies, at the same time as the introduction, during the Renaissance, of bedsteads with canopies upheld by columns, but certainly not with that of table-covers, which, as we have already pointed out elsewhere, were a natural contrivance for hiding an economy the owners did not wish to betray, which had led to their employment of turners instead of carvers in wood. There were now quantities of costly materials to be had in France, and there is no cause for surprise at the fact that the middle classes loved to show off pieces of stuff such as but recently the nobility alone were privileged to use. The cultivation of the mulberry-tree having been successful in the South, Lyons

## FOREIGN INFLUENCE

had begun to manufacture silk which rivalled even that of Florence and Genoa, Tours became celebrated for her coarse taffetas, workmen invited to come over from Anatolia and the islands of the Archipelago produced in Paris itself embroideries in the Oriental style, and numerous artisans working in the Louvre and in the Rue de la Tixerandrie decorated textile fabrics with designs founded on exotic plants which they copied in the Royal gardens recently laid out for that very purpose, and which were later to develop into the extensive Jardin des Plantes.

On the other hand, the Italians are to be credited with the introduction into quite humble rooms of certain minor decorative features which add greatly to their charm and comfort, such as crystal or glass chandeliers, sconces in the shape of an arm fixed on to the wall, the closed fist holding a wax candle, and above all the great mirrors framed in carved and gilded wood or in undecorated ebony, varied by the fertile imagination of the French with *appliqué* work cut out and chased in copper or silver. This mirror was the natural supplement of the cabinet, or of the *bureau* founded on it—*bureau* being the old name used in mediæval times for the counter covered with a coarse brownish stuff

## FRENCH FURNITURE

called *drap de bure*,\* and later given to a novelty introduced towards the end of the reign of Louis XIII. It is scarcely necessary to describe the well-known shape of this familiar little piece of furniture. It is a chest set on a table, not so deep as the top of the latter, and pushed back a little so as to afford a rest for the hand of a writer seated at it. About the beginning of the eighteenth century it became customary to call this variety of the cabinet by the name of *commode*, the lower part of which consisted of nothing more than a table provided with drawers, distinguished at the same period as the *bas d'armoire*, or the lower *armoire*. It is as well to make a point of giving these names, which we shall have to use constantly in dealing with succeeding reigns.

\* The nearest English equivalent to *drap de bure* is drugget.—TRANS.



THE SEVENTH CHAPTER  
THE REIGN OF LOUIS XIV



IN the history of art the reign of Louis XIV. does not begin in the year 1643, when he actually ascended the throne at the age of five years, but at the foundation in 1663 of the so-called Manufacture Royale des Meubles de la Couronne, better known under the name of the Gobelins, which preserves the memory of the former possessor of the Parisian mansion in which it was installed four years later. This institution, founded by the great minister Colbert, the pupil and successor of Mazarin, was really the development of an idea conceived by Henri IV. at the beginning of the century, of collecting in the Louvre artisans and experts in different handicrafts, to encourage art all over the country and to give a healthy impulse to the manufacture of all manner of beautiful work, the sale of which might augment the wealth of the country. It was, in fact, intended to promote the minor arts, such as the making of tapestry and jewellery, and those in which the materials were wood, metals, and precious stones of every variety, just as the Academy

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of Painting and Sculpture, which had received its letters patent in 1655, encouraged the more important branches of art-production. The two establishments soon became great art centres, thanks to the Royal protection, which raised their members above all the petty rules of corporations and kept them supplied with an unbroken succession of commissions, lavishing on them larger sums of money than any sovereign had ever before spent on luxuries. For the twenty years during which the prosperity of the Grand Roi lasted, the *éclat* of these two establishments was so great throughout the whole of Europe as to eclipse all other schools or to convert them into mere reflections of themselves. It is from this moment that the world-wide supremacy of French art really dates, and if at the present day it has been compelled to give way before the ever-increasing strength of its adversaries, it is because the democratic principles now applied to art are in direct contravention to those of Colbert's conception. That great man recognised with remarkable acuteness that the French character, with its rare æsthetic gifts, needed, if it were to reach its highest development, a lofty ideal on which to concentrate its efforts and a liberality that gave full play to its imagination. It

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was thus that the wonderful artists of the Middle Ages may be said to have been the outcome of the religious enthusiasm of their time, and to have turned to account the inexhaustible treasures of the Church. The great minister of the seventeenth century in his turn set before his contemporaries the ambition to emulate the splendour of the sovereign who said *L'état c'est moi*, and lavished upon them half the revenues of the kingdom in a constant stream. "Sire," he wrote to Louis XIV., "a useless meal costing three thousand livres afflicts on me incredible suffering, for I consider it essential to refrain from all unnecessary expense so as to have millions to lavish whenever it is a question of promoting your glory and that of France." He therefore grudged nothing to the artists of the Academy, still less to the army of men of talent collected in the Gobelins manufactory or who still lived in rooms in the Grand Gallery of the Louvre. The double result of this wise prodigality was that the artistic *éclat* of the reign remains to this day its highest title to glory, and that money flowed in in immense quantities from without, to enrich what was then called the "magnificent" nation which supplied all civilised races with beautiful things.

Louis XIV. was fortunate in that Colbert



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was in power from the very beginning of his reign, for that minister was the man best fitted to assure his greatness; whilst Colbert himself was no less happy in having placed almost at once at his disposal a talented, industrious, and prolific artist, gifted in the highest degree with the genius for organisation necessary to carry out the lavish designs of his master, as well as to develop the industrial system he himself had in view. This was Le Brun, whom Colbert had seen at work in the celebrated Château of Vaux, the all too royal luxury of which had aroused the jealousy of the sovereign, and caused the fall of its owner, Fouquet, then Minister of Finance. Colbert knew that the painter, who was already very well known, had contended zealously for the privileges of the Academy, and that he had had considerable practice in the administration of affairs, not only at Vaux, but also as director of the tapestry manufactory that the minister had founded at Maincy. In 1660 Le Brun received the commission to paint for Fontainebleau the picture known as the "Clemency of Alexander"; in 1662 he was appointed Chief Court Painter to Louis XIV., immediately after which he designed and partly executed the decorations of the Apollo Gallery, receiving a little later the appointment of Director of the new Manufacture Royale des Meubles de la Couronne.



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The influence exercised by Le Brun over the art of his time, thanks to the power given him by the constant favour of Colbert and of Louis XIV., was without doubt immense. Certain critics, especially at the present time when naturalism is very much in vogue, choose to look only on the pernicious side of the sort of academic tyranny which was the result of the artist's inordinate admiration for classic style after the Bolognese manner. This is, however, unjust, for Le Brun did but share the universal convictions of a period still impregnated with the results of two centuries of exclusive infatuation for Italian work; and, without having any special predilection either for his composition or his colouring, we know how to recognise that he had the really sterling merit of giving to the works he issued from the Gobelins manufactory, in spite of their want of grace, a decided grandeur and dignity of style, quite unlike the involved and incongruous confusion of Italianism, or the somewhat heavy simplicity borrowed by second-rate designers from the North. This is, perhaps, a less obvious though more natural cause than is generally supposed for those French imitations of Roman models, which were first generally disseminated by the Jesuit Martellange, under Henri IV. But the artistic

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breadth of view of a Le Brun was needed to give to the style a genuine beauty and thus enable it to triumph over foreign rivalry. Those who are disposed to dispute this have but to run through the incredibly long lists of works for which he himself made the designs or which he executed entirely. Without enumerating them here we may mention that between 1663 and 1690 he drew the cartoons after which were woven nineteen hangings, that is to say, 8400 ells of tapestry, and that at the same time he was executing or directing the decorations at Versailles, Saint-Germain and Marly, making designs for the royal plate, architectural plans, such as those for the church of Saint Eustache, the Gates of Paris, the Fountains of Versailles, making suggestions for the decoration of ships, and collaborating with numerous sculptors in the erection of various monuments. All this personal work was got through in addition to the daily official duties of the superintendent of the manufactory, in which lived not only a whole population of artists and workmen, but also sixty poor children apprenticed to the trade by the Treasury.

It is greatly to the credit of Le Brun that he knew how to gather about him to aid him in carrying out the vast commissions of Louis XIV. all the most eminent artists of the

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day ; in fact we may almost say that he was instrumental in their rise, and when we see the list of their names it is impossible to help admiring the liberal-mindedness of this great man and his skill in associating with each other men of the most varied gifts, and of leading them by the force of his own example to collaborate in works of a most diverse character. Unfortunately, the artists of the present day fail to emulate them, and the thorough mediocrity that has for a long time characterised industrial art, especially the making of furniture, is only too easily explained by the ridiculous pride which leads artists to think it degrading to devote themselves to any work but that of making pictures and statues or of adorning the façades of houses. At the Gobelins manufactory, Le Brun induced the painters Van der Meulen, Monnoyer, Yvart, the two Boullognes, Noël and Antoine Coypel, with the sculptors Coysevox, Anguier, Tuby and Caffieri, and the engravers Le Clerc, Audran and Rousselet, to work side by side with the ebenists Cucci, Pierre Poitou, the jewellers Alexis Loir, Claude de Villers and Dutel, the lapidaries Giacetti, Branchi, Horatio and Ferdinando Migliorini, and the tapestry-makers Jans and his son. These are but a few amongst the many employees of the manufactory, and to



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them must be added the artists who lodged in the Louvre and were under the control of the chief superintendent, such as the jeweller Bellin, the ebenist Charles André Boulle, and the engraver Varin, whilst beyond his direct authority, though within the sphere of his activity, were yet other workers, men of special interest in connection with our subject, whom we must not neglect to notice, such as Marot, Le Pautre and Bérain.

To avoid having to recur to them again, we will speak here of those artists who, even when associated with Le Brun, showed a certain originality of design. The architect and engraver Jean Marot, who died in 1679, and his son Daniel, who died about 1712, published a great number of engravings, representing everything connected with the furnishing of a house and the decoration of its exterior; they also aided greatly in the diffusion of the style named after Louis XIV. not only in France but elsewhere, especially when Daniel Marot, who after the issue of the Edict of Nantes was in danger of arrest for his Huguenot opinions, went to Holland, where he became architect to the Prince of Orange. The designs of Jean le Pautre, who died in 1682, and of his brother Antoine, who died in 1691, inspired many wood-carvers who still adhered to some extent

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to the Louis XIII. style with its ornate Italianism. The former issued engravings of some two thousand designs, which he probably also executed himself, for, the son of an artisan, he had begun life as a cabinet-maker. To him and to his brother, who was architect to the King, are attributed, amongst other works, certain consoles in the Palace of Versailles, upholding on strong and dignified supports slabs of fine marble. Jean Bérain, who in 1674 was appointed Dessinateur de la Chambre et du Cabinet du Roi,\* also published a great number of engravings of decorative motives, with the aid of his brother Claude, who was an engraver by profession. Although his talent was really akin to that of Le Brun, whose pupil he is even supposed to have been, his work is strangely suggestive of the traditions of Du Cerceau—a fact which has led some critics to regret that Bérain was not chosen rather than the painter of the Gallery of Apollo to direct the costly works commissioned by the royal patron, for his taste, more essentially French as it was, would have been very effective in them. In a comparison of their æsthetic qualities the preference might be given to Bérain, but it must not be forgotten that to carry out

\* It was the duty of the holder of this office to design the scenery and costumes for Court festivities.—TRANS.

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the work accomplished at the Gobelins manufactory a great administrator was needed as well as a great artist. There is nothing to show that the Dessinateur du Roi combined these qualities, so rarely found together, in anything like the same degree as Le Brun.

We might add many names to this list of the masters who followed the path so clearly marked out by the director of the royal manufactory, a path which led, as has been well said by an old chronicler, "to the absorption into French taste of a long accumulation of foreign lessons." To do so would, however, be to specialise too much for a general history such as this. Our task is to deal with the essential characteristics of the Louis XIV. style—that is to say, of the work of the collaborators of Le Brun.

As may have been noticed in the list just given of the chief artists who worked in the Gobelins manufactory, Italian names alternate with French. Indeed, under Le Brun's direction foreigners were never excluded, and these foreigners were all naturalised, most of them having been attracted to France by Mazarin. It must, moreover, be remembered that in spite of the hatred of the people for the nationality of this clever minister, whom they chose to look upon as a rogue, the taste for Italian imports did not decline until much later. To prove this it is only necessary to

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glance over the titles that French designers gave to their inventions, with a view to recommending them to the public, and to which are generally added the significant words, *à l'Italienne* or *à la Romaine*.

The most highly thought of amongst the Italians who worked for the King were Domenico Cucci and Filippo Caffieri; and although the latter alone is now famous, they seem to have been looked upon as equals by their contemporaries, as is shown by four lines of bad poetry, written by the Abbé de Marolles :

“ Pour la sculpture en bois, là sont venus de Rome  
D'entre les bons sculpteurs, Philippe Caffieri,  
Et du mesme pays Dominique Cucci,  
Que partout en leur art, justement on renomme.”

The royal accounts prove that the commissions given to Cucci were extremely numerous, although he is only alluded to as “ebenist” or “founder.” Unfortunately, nothing now remains but descriptions of the important pieces of furniture produced by him, from which we gather that he had not given up the decorative methods of his native country. Noteworthy examples are the two large cabinets intended for the Gallery of Apollo, famous at the time of their production under the names of the Temples of Glory and Virtue, one of which was surmounted by a



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figure of Louis XIV. as Apollo, leading four horses, and the other by a figure of Queen Maria Theresa of Austria as Diana, leading four stags. All that now remains of these sumptuous cabinets, which appear to have cost the treasury the enormous sum for that time of 30,500 livres, is three miniatures by Werner, which formed part of their decoration, and are now in the Louvre Museum. The actual cabinets were given to the naturalist Buffon for his museum in 1747, evidently because the mosaics let into them were considered by contemporary opinion to be interesting only from the mineralogist's point of view. Cucci produced other cabinets that seem to have been no less costly and complicated, called of "War," of "Peace," of "The Sun," and of "The Kings." The descriptions in the Inventory show how redundant was the ornamentation with its mythological motives indulged in by the Italian ebenist, who in this respect rivalled even Golle, once the favourite of Mazarin. It would be unjust to leave this now too much neglected artist, without mentioning that his work was not limited to the ornate compositions we have enumerated. The "*Comptes des Bâtiments du Roi*" prove that he did not disdain to employ his talent in making locks and window-bolts for the palaces, in which the Grand Monarque



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insisted on having the very smallest details magnificent; and in addition to these, lists are given of small items sent out from his foundry for more worthy usage, such as lintels of doors, frames for looking-glasses, balustrades, pedestals, borders for marble basins, &c.

Filippo Caffieri came to France towards the close of Mazarin's life, and was more of a wood-carver than a founder; he married, in 1665, a cousin-german of Le Brun, and became the father of eleven children, three of whom followed his profession. His chief occupation was to make furniture and picture-frames for the royal palaces. A few extracts from the "Comptes des Bâtimens" will give an idea of his ordinary avocations; in 1665 he received 267 livres for three arm-chairs carved in the antique style (that is to say, in the Henri IV. or Louis XIII. style) and twelve folding-seats of a similar kind; in 1666 he was paid 72 livres for a border eight feet long by six broad, 34 livres for a pedestal, 74<sup>1</sup> for ten picture-frames of carved wood intended for the *cabinet du Roi*, 400 for certain other frames, 100 for work for the *petits appartemens du Roi*, and 400 for the carvings of the cornice of the Chapel of Versailles. As collaborators at the Gobelins manufactory he had his fellow countryman

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Tuby, the sculptor Lespagnandel, and some gilders such as Paul Gougeon de la Baronnère. The chief interest of his work from our point of view, justifying the space we have given to him, is not so much in his capacity as *Sculpteur Ordinaire des Meubles de la Couronne* as in the transition he marks between the Italian style of which Cucci was an obstinate adherent to that which was evolved under the powerful influence of Le Brun. No doubt Caffieri was not able entirely to throw off the Southern love of glitter which was in his blood, for he overloaded his work with gilding, silver-plating, and transparent-blue *appliqué* metal, but beneath all this unnecessary ornament the lines of his designs are essentially graceful, and of taste so truly French that they involuntarily betray the preponderating influence of the master chosen by Colbert. Amongst the works attributed to Caffieri still remaining in French palaces it is alone necessary, in order to trace the curious movement we are considering, to study certain undoubtedly authentic examples, such as the carved folding-doors of the great staircase of Versailles, with the sun, helmets, chimærae, laurel-leaves, and the royal monogram, no longer in the Italian style, though the outcome of it, the style of Louis XIV.

Leaving the Italian colony of the Gobelins

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manufactory, the tendencies of which are sufficiently indicated by the accounts we have given of its two most gifted members, we will pass to the master who under Le Brun typifies French furniture—André Charles Boulle. First of all, it is important to correct a widely spread and long-persistent mistake. Not only has it been supposed that the great ebenist in question invented tortoiseshell and brass marqueterie as a decoration for furniture, but that he practised nothing else—every work of the kind being attributed to him. Nothing could be more inexact. The making of marqueterie in which copper, tin, tortoiseshell and horn were used was practised by Italians residing in France long before the time of Boulle, and he cannot have been more than ten years old when in 1653 the inventory of Mazarin was drawn up in which are described several examples of the kind. Secondly, as proved by a number of documents relating to him, our ebenist was the author of quite as much marqueterie-work in which wood was the only material as of that in which other substances were employed. It is even probable that there remain a greater number of examples of the former, though they are not attributed to Boulle, than of the latter, on account of their greater durability. Lastly, if Boulle was not the author of the first works in tortoiseshell



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attributed to him, neither is he to be credited with all those produced in the reign of Louis XIV., still less of those that appeared in the eighteenth century, though his life was prolonged to 1732. He had four sons, who continued to practise his art for some years after his death, and, moreover, he also had many imitators who kept up the fashion of the use of tortoiseshell in furniture during the second half of the eighteenth century, their work being so good that it is impossible to fix its date without a very careful examination of the copper-plates. The great talent of Father Boulle, as he is styled in the inventory drawn up in 1720 of the commissions destroyed when his workshops were burnt, was really displayed chiefly in the care with which he superintended the construction of the cabinets, tables, and *armoires* that left his manufactory, but it would be a great exaggeration to credit him with all the actual execution and with all the designing. His drawings are now extremely rare, and there is no doubt that he very often borrowed from those of his more illustrious contemporaries, especially Bérain, Le Pautre, and Le Brun. The decorative figures in copper that he wrought and cast in a broad and masterly manner were designed by specially chosen artists, such as Cucci. As for ebony- and marqueterie-work properly



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so called, neither was so difficult of execution for it to be necessary to do more than secure good workmen, such as Percheron, surnamed Lochon, Louis Denis, Sommord, Poitou, and Armand, who are all mentioned in the royal accounts as having worked in the same places as the master himself at commissions of a less important kind. Lastly, it must be remembered that the King paid high wages at the same rate as to Boulle, to a Flemish artist, Alexandre Jean Oppenordt, a cabinet-maker in ebony, from whom he ordered furniture exactly like that he entrusted to his chief inlayer—twelve cabinets for medals, for instance, in 1683, a *bureau* for the "Cabinet des Curiosités," and some designs for *chambranles*, as the borders of doors and windows were called, a parquet floor of different-coloured woods in 1686 for the small gallery of Versailles, and in 1688 some works in marqueterie and gilded copper for the Duke of Burgundy.

For all that, however, the public has forgotten Oppenordt, and is even more oblivious of his imitators, attributing everything to André Charles Boulle. This injustice, for which there is really no cause, does not detract at all from the superior merit of the last-named, who was the author of some of the most costly pieces that bear witness at the present day to the artistic culture of

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the reign of Louis XIV. under the influential direction of Le Brun. The accompanying illustrations will do more to prove this than any amount of wearisome description, and we will content ourselves with naming the cabinets which chance has collected in the Gallery of Apollo in the Louvre, the *commode* of the Mazarin Library, the Bavarian cabinet of the Duke of Buccleuch, the one formerly in the Hamilton collection, with many other works which certainly at least came out of Boulle's workshops, such as the *armoires* of Windsor Castle, with the bronze figures of Apollo and Daphne, Apollo and Marsyas, The Rape of Helen, and the history of Louis XIV., engraved on medallions supplementing allegorical figures of religion and wisdom, and those in the Wallace Collection with the figures of the four seasons. But in addition to the evidence of these fine pieces of furniture, which have survived in spite of their sensitiveness to changes of temperature, three reasons seem to us to explain the appropriation by André Charles Boulle, or rather by his name, of all the glory of his contemporaries. To begin with, there was his great longevity, for he was ninety years old when he died, whilst his traditions were carried on by his sons, who inherited his skill ; secondly, he did not, like most of those employed by the Treasury,

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work exclusively for the King, but also for many wealthy private patrons, such as the financier Samuel Bernard, and Crozat, as well as for such princes as the Duke of Savoy, the Duke of Lorraine, the Elector of Cologne, and even for the King of Siam; and thirdly, most convincing reason of all, he was the chief author of the furniture of the rooms of the Dauphin, which were for a long time looked upon as the most luxurious in the world, and to which Louis XIV. delighted in taking all his guests of importance. The praises were sung by the poets of the day of this

grand cabinet si riche en ornemens,  
Car le moindre d'entre eux au poids de l'or ce pèse.\*

Félibien in his "Description Sommaire de Versailles," published in 1703, calls up a picture which it is worth while to quote, for it gives a far better idea than could any words of ours of what was looked upon as the ideal way of furnishing a royal apartment in the time of Louis XIV. "In the home of Monseigneur," he says, "in the two large rooms of his apartments may be seen an exquisite collection of everything that can be imagined of the most rare and costly, not only in the

\* Vast apartment with its wealth of ornaments. The very least of them worth its weight in gold.



## FRENCH FURNITURE

actual furniture, such as tables, cabinets, porcelain, chandeliers, and candelabra, but also masterpieces by the greatest painters, bronzes, vases of agate, cameos, and other works of art, jewellery made of the most precious stones, and the finest examples of Oriental blue. The larger of these two apartments now occupies the place of the three compartments which were formerly next to the bed-chamber; Mignard le Romain\* painted the ceiling, introducing the portrait of Monseigneur, and in the third compartment, which has an entrance into the lower gallery in the centre of the *château*, looking-glasses, as already stated, are let into the ceiling and the walls framed in gilded borders on a ground of ebony marqueterie. The parquet floor is also made of inlaid wood [*marquétage*] and enriched with various ornaments, such as, amongst others, the monograms of Monseigneur and Madame la Dauphine."

By way of contrast, and to make our record complete, we will now quote, with all the dry minuteness of the original document, which we have before our eyes, the inventory made after the death of its owner of the furniture in the bedroom of a wealthy Parisian citizen of the middle of the reign of Louis XIV. The

\* So called to distinguish him from his brother Pierre Mignard.—TRANS.



## THE REIGN OF LOUIS XIV

citizen we have chosen is Molière, with whose name every one is familiar.

One *armoire* in German wood with two folding-doors, ornamented with iron and copper, and with shelves in front . . . . . 52 livres

[Here follows a list of the books in the *armoire*.]

- Item.* Twelve cushions of Venetian brocade stuffed with feathers and provided with tassels, and two square doors of wood varnished in the Chinese style. Of the twelve cushions [intended to sit upon], eight have large red flowers on them, and four green 60 livres
- Item.* Twelve more cushions of Indian cloth, painted, and two pure *sorte-carreaux* of varnished wood 36 livres
- Item.* Six chairs of varnished and gilded wood with their cushions of taffeta striped with satteen . 35 livres
- Item.* A Turkish table-cover . . . . . 15 livres
- Item.* A large Turkey carpet . . . . . 60 livres
- Item.* Another Turkey carpet . . . . . 30 livres
- Item.* A green Flemish tapestry curtain . . 800 livres
- Item.* A small piece of green tapestry . . 30 livres
- Item.* A curtain of Auvergne tapestry (very old) 60 livres
- Item.* A wooden table with a parquet top, representing flowers [*marquetée*], and two small round tables of similar wood . . . . . 18 livres
- Item.* A little table with pillars of turned wood 30 livres
- Item.* Another little table of blackened wood with a drawer, a small curtain of woollen material from a little cabinet, and two arm-chairs covered with similar tapestry . . . . . 10 livres
- Item.* A horizontal glass mirror with a frame made of walnut-wood . . . . . 4 livres
- Item.* Two stitched coverlets or counterpanes with a satin border lined with carnation-coloured taffeta, the other of carnation taffeta with a flesh-coloured border . . . . . 20 livres

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- Item.* A little couch of joiner's wood with a border of gilded wood and feet representing eaglet's claws ; two mattresses, one covered with green satin with a floral design ; and a bolster covered with similar satin  
100 livres
- Item.* Another couch of joiner's wood carved and gilded like the above, with two bolsters, two mattresses, and two pillows covered with satin . . . 140 livres
- Item.* Two arm-chairs of gilded wood covered with green satin . . . 40 livres
- Item.* Two window curtains of white taffeta with silk cords . . . 45 livres
- Item.* A tapestry hanging of satin with a green ground and borders of white satin with gold flowers  
70 livres
- Item.* A door-screen and chimney-board with valances of green and greenish white, finished off with fringes  
12 livres
- Item.* A couch with feet representing eaglet's claws, painted a bronze green, with a painted and gilded head-board [here follows a detailed description of the ornamentation], a canopy with an azure blue background, carved and gilded, with four eagles in relief, on gilded wood, four knobs shaped like vases, also of gilded wood ; the canopy draped inside with gold and green taffeta, the valances of the bed of the same material, all finished off with gold and green fringes. A smaller canopy within the larger one of gilded wood, carved to represent a bell, draped outside with grey taffeta, embroidered with gold twist, finished off with gold silk fringe, and lined with Avignon taffeta. Inside hangings, of the same taffeta with fringe [here follows a description of the brocade curtains]  
2000 livres
- Item.* Two small carved loo-tables of gilded wood with three eaglet's claws for feet, painted bronze colour, top hexagonal . . . 80 livres
- Item.* Six arm-chairs with Sphinx figures completely gilded, and provided with cushions for the seat and back of

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- flowered satin with a violet ground, finished off with green and gold silk fringe . . . . . 200 livres
- Item.* Six alcove curtains, two door curtains, and nine valances for the same, these valances and the cover for the overmantel of crimson taffeta, and all finished off with fringes and tassels.
- Item.* Two window curtains with their silk cords and valances for the top . . . . . 45 livres

This biographical document is not only, as will be seen, interesting to the admirers of Molière, but also of importance to our subject, which must be our excuse for quoting it at length. It illustrates the taste for luxury which the Grand Monarque spread amongst the middle class, and at the same time gives the actual prices of the beautiful pieces of furniture manufactured by private firms. Moreover, it reveals to us, in a manner the more striking for its very simplicity, the strife that was then going on between the Louis XIII. and the Italian styles, as well as between the latter and that inaugurated at the Gobelins. The bed described above, magnificent and costly though it was, is draped entirely in the old style, some of the tables have turned feet, in the fashion in vogue under Henri II., but simplified, as seen in the engravings of Abraham Bosse, whilst the gilded, painted, and varnished chairs, arm-chairs, and small round tables reflect more or less clearly the influence of



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the Italian style. On the other hand, there is none of the tortoiseshell marqueterie which Boulle was beginning to make popular, a fact tending to prove that it was then very costly, and reserved for royalty. Lastly, the bedroom of this period reveals the first introduction of a new piece of furniture—the couch, also known as the *lit à la duchesse*, which is much the same thing as the modern sofa, with one or two pillows—that is to say, a lounge, with a support for the back at one or both ends. If we had given the whole of the inventory we should have come to two other new inventions: the screen to place in front of the hearth, and the folding-screen, introduced from the East at the same time as the lacquer or varnished work in the Chinese style, of which, as we have seen, the famous comedian had a few examples.

It would, no doubt, be interesting before closing this chapter on furniture in the time of Louis XIV. to dwell on the extraordinary influence exercised over the manners of all the intellectual classes by the arrogant personality of the King; to comment, for instance, on the way in which the furniture of private homes directly reflects the luxury of the monarch, and to quote the profound reflection of La Bruyère, “Il n’y a point de patrie dans le despotique; d’autres choses y suppléent



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l'intérêt, la gloire, le service du prince"; but the history of those days is so well known, and they are so near to our own time, that we may well leave to our readers the task of drawing deductions which would greatly widen the scope of the subject to which our present work is limited.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER  
THE REGENCY AND LOUIS XV



NOTHING checked the evolution of French decorative art in the direction so vigorously given to it by the artists patronised by the munificence of Louis XIV. and the wise judgment of Colbert; not even the death of the great minister, which occurred in 1683, nor that of Le Brun, who died seven years later; not the ruinous wars which occupied the whole of the closing years of the reign, and necessitated the closing for a long time of the royal Gobelins manufactory, nor the religious zeal with which the King was inspired, through his love for Madame de Maintenon, and which introduced at Court at least a semblance of simplicity and economy. All that occurred was the logical modification of public taste in a manner scarcely perceptible to contemporary observers until the decadence and final extinction which resulted from the introduction into society of ideas and interests absolutely novel. By this we mean less the crisis of the Revolution than the military despotism of Napoleon I., which turned the thoughts of the

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nation completely away from matters artistic, that had seemed of such vital importance in the society of the eighteenth century, and concentrated all eyes upon the enthralling and terrible drama of the conquest of Europe on which depended the very life of France. We shall be able to prove beyond a doubt, by the examples we give in this closing section of our work, that what is known as the Empire style was due to the last surviving artists of the Monarchy, and that the so-called style of the Restoration represents but the final anguish of their traditions, as interpreted by pupils who were in no sense artists, but ignorant artisans without so much as any manual skill.

These preliminary remarks are necessary to show that in our opinion the French school to which Louis XIV. had the honour of giving his name is one and the same with that we are now about to study, though it is not possible to divide it into distinct and well-defined periods, still less to give to arbitrary sections the deceptive titles in general use of the Regency style, Louis XV. style, Louis XVI., Directory, Empire, or Restoration styles.

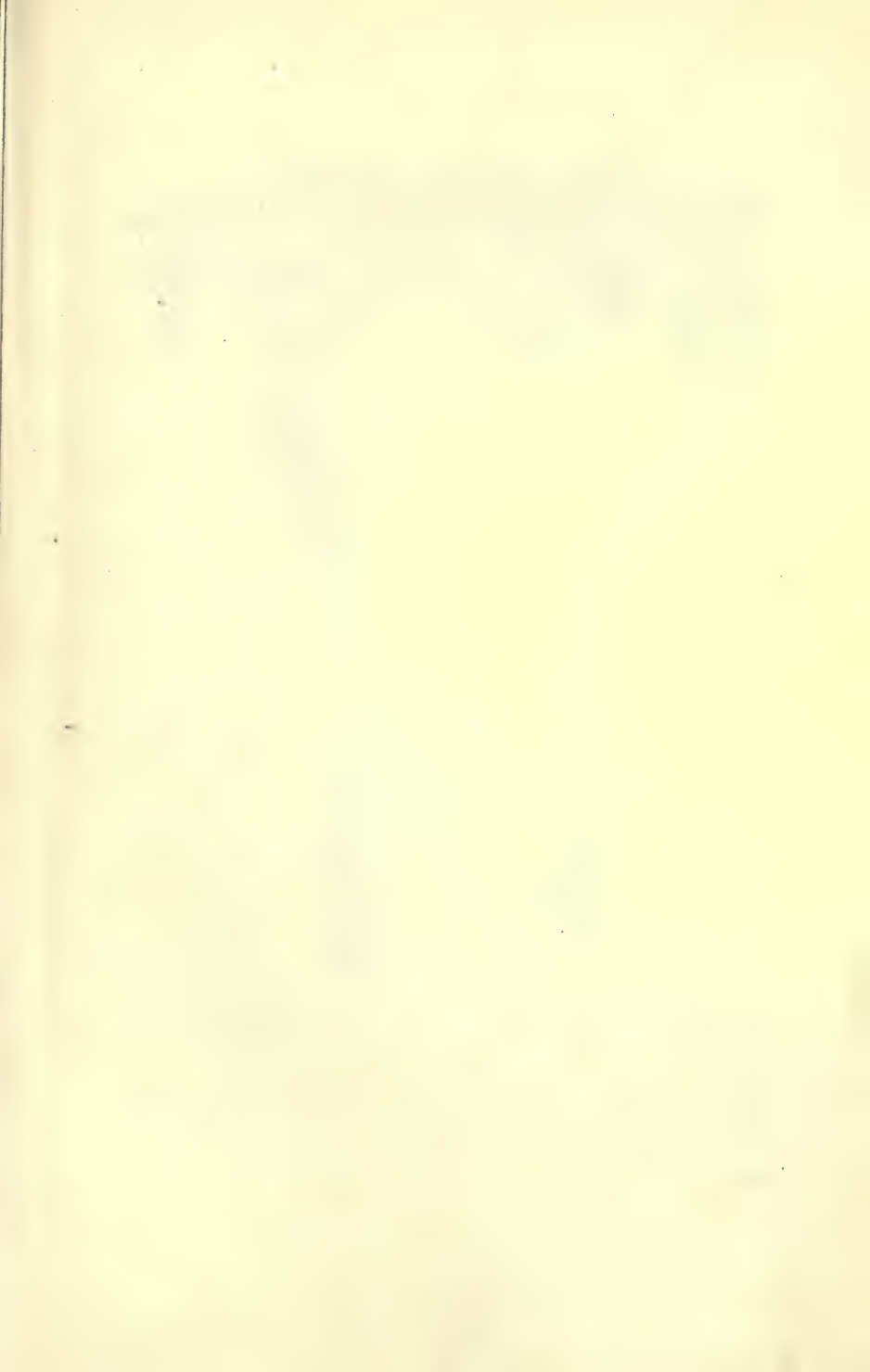
It is easy to quote examples of much earlier date than the death of the Grand Monarque, which took place in 1715, which

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have all the peculiarities supposed to characterise the new reign inaugurated under the regency of Philip of Orleans. These peculiarities consist in a greater suppleness of the general design of furniture, the more constant use of sculptures in metal in its decoration, and the introduction of the shell and of lines derived from it in ornamentation. When we consider the graceful arabesques of Bérain, the drawings left behind him by Oppenordt, by the architect Robert de Cotte, who was already fifty years old when Louis XIV. ascended the throne, the so-called *singeries* of Gillot, who was the master of Watteau, it is easy to see that the quaint whims, supposed to be the exclusive characteristic of the subjects of the great-grandson of Louis XIV., were already indulged in during the best time of the artistic domination of Le Brun, and that they were by no means confined to the works produced in the royal manufactories. The modification of style that was really accentuated during the greater part of the reign of Louis XV. was the use of inharmonious decoration, to which the name of *rocaille* was given. Two considerations readily explain this—the first, a purely moral one, illustrating an historical law, namely, the increasing need of some reaction for minds weary of academic rules in the sense in which they were then understood, which governed

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CONSOLE. Epoch Louis XV. Carnavalet Museum, Paris

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all art production, and took it for granted that symmetry was the leading principle of all noble form, that of the human figure not excepted. The second explanation is more definite and scientific, being merely the growing taste for certain forms of Chinese art, appreciation for which was first started by Mazarin, who owned a good many examples of Chinese lacquer-work and porcelain, as proved by his Inventory. There is no need here to dwell on the caprices indulged in by designers of the remote Orient, on the carelessness with which they repeat the same motives side by side, and the habit they have of constantly breaking off the curved line instead of rounding it off. These are fundamental peculiarities recognised in the most cursory examination ; and, on the other hand, in studying the most rococo examples of the furniture of the Louis XV. period, such as some of the works of Meissonnier or Jacques Caffieri, for instance, there will be no difficulty in discovering quite similar decorative ideas. It remains to point out how the taste for Chinese work spread amongst the people after the death of Mazarin, but we can only do so briefly within the limits of this book, which prevent us from quoting examples of this taste in painting, ceramic ware, tapestry, and embroidery. Collectors of foreign art work,

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such as Mazarin, would naturally try to get manufacturers to imitate works, the acquisition of which proved their own good taste and had cost them so much money. The Dutch began this imitation, the Parisians followed suit. The latter at first gave their whole attention to trying to reproduce Chinese lacquer and varnish, as may be seen from one of the items of the Inventory of Molière's possessions quoted above. Under the date 1692, Pradel's "Livre Commode" notes that there were three manufactories of lacquer-work and furniture in the Chinese style, flourishing in Paris, one in the Faubourg St. Antoine, one in the Grande Rue St. Antoine, and one in the Rue de la Tixeranderie, but their proprietors had been anticipated by others long before, for, according to the "Comptes des Bâtiments du Roi," a certain Louis le Hongre was actually at work in 1655 at decorations in lacquer in the King's palace at Versailles. At first French workmen were content to imitate Chinese designs and colours, then they tried to produce equivalents of them, but it was not, it would seem, until the first quarter of the eighteenth century that they had the audacity to introduce in their decorative carvings dragons exactly like the Oriental type, such as, to quote but one example, those on the handles of a fine *commode* by





CONSOLE. Epoch Louis XV. Collection of M. de le Bretèche



SOFA. Louis XV. Palace of Versailles



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Charles Cressent in the Wallace Collection. This was the important step, and as soon as French ebenists had taken it, they never left off turning for inspiration to examples brought from China, not only for details of ornamentation, but also for the general scheme of decoration, which completely modified the structure of the furniture they produced.

Before resuming the chronological course of our review, it appears to us fitting to speak of the Martins, a family famous for having evolved out of the lacquer-work imported from China, a very distinctively French style of decorating furniture that was one of the chief charms of French homes in the eighteenth century. The most celebrated member of this family was Robert Martin, who was born in 1706. In his marriage certificate, dated 1733, he is already styled a *vernisseur du roi*. One of his brothers held a patent for manufacturing all sorts of works in relief in the Japanese and Chinese styles, and he had three sons, two of whom followed his profession. In documents of this period it is often difficult to decide to which of these artists, all designated by their family name only, this or that work should be attributed. In 1748 the title of Royal Manufactories was given to their three establishments in the

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Faubourg St. Martin, Faubourg St. Denis, and Rue St. Magloire. Between 1749 and 1756 the name of Martin constantly occurs in the royal accounts for works executed at Versailles, especially whilst the apartments of the Dauphin were being re-decorated, their grand ornamentation in the antique style having ceased to please; now and then, also, Madame de Pompadour employed one or more of them in the embellishment of her *château* at Belleville, paying in 1752 for work done by them the sum, very large for the time, of 58,000 livres; the fame of the so-called Martin lacquer-work was then at its height, and Voltaire sings its praise in the following lines:

Ces cabinets où Martin  
A surpassé l'art de la Chine.

The King of Prussia took one of the sons of Martin into his service, and there were pupils enough of the Martin family to flood Europe with the fashionable lacquer-work with which were covered not only the furniture and panels of reception-rooms, but also instruments of music, sedan-chairs, coaches and sledges. It was indeed this very excess which ended in bringing the style into disrepute. Even before the death of Louis XV. people began to turn against what were called



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*pagodas*, which were mere copies of foreign models in imitation lacquer with a black, red, white, or reddish brown ground, as well as against the *singeries* and *chinoiseries* in the production of which lacquer-makers collaborated with painters such as Watteau, Gillot, Huet, Boucher, Leprince, and Gravelot. Examples of furniture varnished in the Martin style are too numerous, even at the present day, for it to be necessary to mention any particular ones—moreover, those who wish to get a thorough idea of the brilliant yet delicate charm of the process, should go and see the pretty little boudoirs decorated by real masters of the style, such as those in the Château of Chantilly, and in the National Printing Establishment in what was once the Hôtel de Rohan.

We must now close this parenthesis devoted to the Martins and return to the Regency. It would doubtless not have become customary to designate by that title the short period of insensible transition between the style of Louis XIV. and that of Louis XV. but for the fact that the man who was perhaps the very best decorative artist of the century, Charles Cressent, flourished in it. Born in 1685, this grandson of an ebenist and son of a sculptor, this master whose taste and skill were alike remarkable, lived until 1768, keeping up the

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true traditions of the art of making furniture at a time when the reaction in favour of the light and graceful might have led to degeneration. His grand talent as a sculptor led him to give dignity to certain new motives, which if produced during the time of the Grand Monarque would probably have been quite lacking in that quality, and would have even become vulgar if the old French traditions had been for one moment abandoned. We allude especially to the exquisite figures of women placed at the corners of furniture, chiefly on tables to which the name of *espagnolettes* was given, and which are suggestive of the delicate type of female beauty evolved by Watteau. But although Cressent was first of all a master of works of art in bronze, he never neglected the general style of the furniture made in his workshops, without which his sculptures would have been of no value, and he followed the style of Oppenordt and Robert de Cotte. To get a good idea of the talent of Cressent, it is desirable to examine the beautiful furniture enriching the Louvre and Wallace collections: the latter indeed contains what is perhaps his most highly finished masterpiece—the *commode* already mentioned with handles representing Chinese dragons. It is, moreover, easy to determine the works of this ebenist of the Regent, who was the author of





CORNER CUPBOARD. Epoch Louis XV. Greffuhle Collection



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the greater number of the best pieces of furniture of his time, for he has himself described many of them in the lists for three sales held during his life, in terms of proud appreciation, for which his undoubted superiority is an excuse. He speaks, for instance, of a bookcase "in the best taste," a "clock worthy to be placed in the very finest cabinets," a *bureau* "ornamented with the most distinguished bronzes," *commodes* "of the most elegant form, adorned with bronzes of extraordinary richness." To attempt to describe, or even enumerate them here would be to fill the remaining pages of this book; many are in tortoiseshell marqueterie after the style of Boulle, whose pupil Cressent certainly was, others are in marqueterie of different coloured woods, violet, pink or purple, a kind of work the latter is wrongly credited with having invented. As a rule, however, his decorative designs in brass are so wonderfully beautiful that the attention is drawn away from the furniture they adorn, and the critics who look upon this as a fault, do not sufficiently remember that in the golden age of French cabinet-making more attention was given to the carving of furniture than to any other detail. Now we repeat that Charles Cressent was a true and also a very great sculptor, as capable of turning out a good bust to

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order, such as the one of Philip of Orleans, originally in the fine cabinet of medals of the Abbey of St. Geneviève, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, as with boasting-tool and burin to improvise garlands of flowers, *singeries* after Gillot, and *espagnolettes* after Watteau.

It has been said, and with justice, that until the reaction set in in favour of the straight line—known as the Louis XVI. style—all designers of furniture were but the pupils of Cressent. Unfortunately, as often happens, these pupils exaggerated into faults what were the distinctive qualities of the master. One of them was Juste Aurèle Meissonnier, born at Turin in 1695, who brought with him to Paris, in addition to his Italian cleverness, the decadent taste of his fellow countrymen for lavish and distorted decoration. As designer to the King he used his extraordinary gift of invention to produce a great variety of works, often pleasing enough in spite of the confusion of curves and convolutions, the principle of which, if principle there be, it is difficult to make out, and it is of him and of his imitators that we generally think when the term *rocaille* is used; that style was, however, originated in Italy long before the birth of Meissonnier and passed into France with the masters of the seventeenth century, such as Bernini, but it

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WRITING-TABLE AND CABINET. Louis XV. Mahogany, inlaid with Sèvres Plaques





## THE REGENCY AND LOUIS XV

was not until the end of the Regency that, to use a common but expressive term, it really "took on." *Rocaille*-work was everywhere in great demand, and Meissonnier was ready enough to supply it, as proved by his engravings of designs. He not only designed furniture for the King, but woodwork of all kinds for the general public, especially tables, candelabra, sheaths for swords, snuff-boxes, handles of walking-sticks, scissors, inkstands, tombs, altars, sledges, fireworks, &c.

After his death, in 1750, the post of *Dessinateur de la Chambre et Cabinet du Roi* was held successively until 1764 by the three brothers Slodtz, the sons of a sculptor of Antwerp and the daughter of Cucci. It is quite as impossible to discriminate the share taken by each of these brothers in the work left behind them, as it was in the case of the Martins. They may, indeed, have collaborated—an hypothesis of great probability. True followers of Cressent in the ornamentation of furniture, carrying truth of draughtsmanship almost to the point of frigidity, they indulged in their designs for jewellery in a complicated intricacy greater even than that of Meissonnier, and exceeded only by the style of Thomas Germain, a sculptor and chaser who, like themselves, was in the employ of the Court. We need not dwell now upon their works. We will content

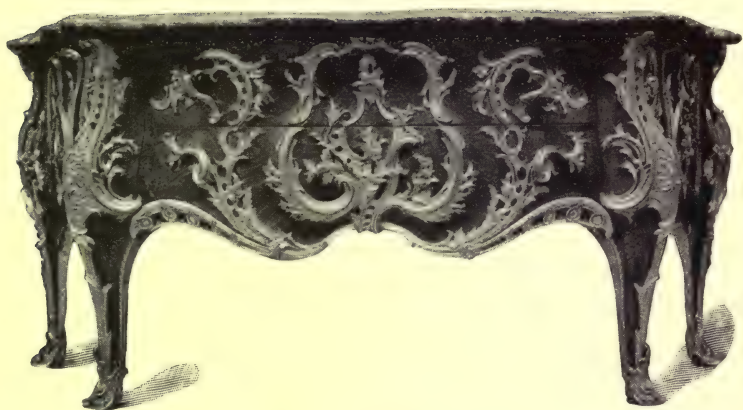
## FRENCH FURNITURE

ourselves with noting that the brothers were gifted with a refined imagination, that they skilfully wielded the chisel of the sculptor and were thoroughly imbued with the French traditions of the preceding century, to which they often turned for inspiration. Their masterpiece is unquestionably a large cabinet for medals, once a treasure of the Palace of Versailles, and now, with the corner-cupboards supplementing it, in the Bibliothèque Nationale. The reproduction we give here makes it unnecessary to dwell either upon the graceful floral arabesques combined with medallions, or upon the general charm of the composition, which, if compared with the *commode* of Cressent figured above, cannot fail to show that a reaction in favour of simplicity was about to set in. We shall recur to this in our next chapter.

To complete the list of the great sculptors in bronze for the decoration of furniture of the *Rocaille* period, we have still to speak of the most fantastic and also the cleverest of them all—Jacques Caffieri, fifth son of the Caffieri who worked for Louis XIV. and father of Philippe, the third of that name of this great family of artists, who collaborated with him in all his work until his own death in 1755.

Some critics, struck with the comparative





LOUIS XV COMMUNE. By Jacques Caffieri, in the Wallace Collection



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soberness of the earlier works of Jacques Caffieri, in which he seems to be an admirer of Robert de Cotte, and with the unbridled imagination of his later productions, in which he greatly exceeds the audacity even of Meissonnier, have conceived the idea that the latter may be attributed to Philippe, and may have been produced during the seven years he survived his father. It is perhaps unnecessary to go so far for an explanation that is founded on no document. The Italian birth of the ebenist of Louis XIV. is quite enough to account for the eagerness with which Jacques Caffieri took up the *Rocaille* style, which gave full scope to his extraordinary dexterity. It was said of his second son Jean Jacques, author of the admirable bust of Rotrou at the Comédie-Française, that he kneaded marble, and of him it might equally well be asserted that he kneaded bronze. In the end he used completely to cover over the furniture he produced with brass decorations; his beautiful *commode* in the Wallace Collection is of an almost austere simplicity compared with the *bureau* in black lacquer of the Ministère de la Justice, the drawers of which are disguised in a complicated casing of copper, whilst the supports down to the very feet are nothing but drooping masses of flowers; or still more compared

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with the famous table with a set of pigeon-holes owned by the Metternich family of Vienna, surmounted by a perfect pyramid of rocks and figures, and with complicated supports without any wood in them at all. It would be impossible to go further in this direction; the art of Caffieri was the culminating effect, the final flare-up, of the lavish style of decoration encouraged by the patronage of Louis XIV. and Madame de Pompadour, which charms in spite of its complicated extravagance. Nor is it, after all, quite fair to criticise this furniture, which would, of course, be out of place in modern rooms, but was quite appropriate in the lofty *salons* of the time, with their carved wainscots and richly decorated ceilings.

The designers of decorative sculpture so dominated the Louis XV. period that the names of the ebenists who collaborated with them are no longer known to the public. It is really unjust not to remember Gaudreaux, who not only made the cabinet for medals designed by the Slodtzs, but also a great number of pieces of furniture for the Court of the chief favourite of the King; Joubert, who was the author of the corner-cupboard supplementing it; Migeon, who showed so much taste in the toilette furniture of Madame de Pompadour that she rewarded him with a pen-



CHEST OF DRAWERS. Epoch Louis XV. In the Préfecture of Indre-et-Loire



MEDAL CABINET. By Slodtz. From the private apartments of Louis XV at Versailles



LOUIS XV SECRÉTAIRE. With Marqueterie inlaid with Sèvres panels. South Kensington Museum



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sion of a thousand crowns ; Sulpice, Arnoult and Lorient, who devoted themselves to making the mechanical tables which obviated the necessity of having servants to wait at meals, arm-chairs that could be taken to pieces, and tables with springs, all proofs of the attention then given to comfort. Already, however, all documents relating to these men are lost, and even less is known of a large number of artists who have left nothing but their signatures, or sometimes only their initials, to tantalise in vain the curiosity of the amateur, on pieces of furniture of undoubted charm. The following are a few of such names : I. P. Latz, L. Boudin, J. Dubois, Gillet, Bernard, Pierre Pionnier, Etienne Levasseur, Nicolas Petit, François Bayer, Claude Choquet, Guesnon, Pierre Denizot, J. B. Hédouin, Pierre Garnier, Jean Pierre Lathuile, Jacques Dautriche, Filleul, C. L. de la Roue, Le Blanc, Voisin, Jabodot, Hébert, Delorme, Lazare, Duvaux, Pleney, Robert Victor la Croix, and Pineau.

Every one will recognise better than we can describe in our brief space the appropriateness of the Regency style, succeeded by the *Rocaille*, to the manners of the half-century during which reigned the thoughtless but artistic prince, to whom his people too hastily gave the name of the Well-Beloved. The

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literature of the time is still widely read, and paintings and engravings representing the life of the aristocracy and middle classes are everywhere disseminated. Watteau, whose lovers in theatrical costumes wander about in melancholy-looking, conventional landscapes, caught the very spirit of the society, which delighted in combining jesting with philosophy, and was willing to allow the very greatest artists to spend their whole lives in designing such trifles as furniture of various kinds.



LOUIS XV WRITING TABLE Mahogany inlaid with Sèvres  
Plaques. South Kensington Museum





THE NINTH CHAPTER

LOUIS XVI., THE REVOLUTION  
AND THE EMPIRE



IN the preceding chapter we have described only that branch of the Louis XIV. style which culminated and came to an end in the wild efflorescence of the *Rocaille* phase, which, however, had also dominated the reign of Louis XV. We have now to study another style, evolved side by side with it, at first comparatively humble, but which gradually became its equal in importance, and eventually superseded it. We allude to the decorative style most inappropriately called that of Louis XVI., seeing that its finest period was when Madame du Barry was in favour. There was, indeed, no revolution in public taste—there are never any sudden changes in the history of art—not even a return to the old simplicity which would have been explained by the weariness of excessive complication of design, but simply the success of a school that had remained more in touch with academic traditions, a success brought about to some extent by the lack of men of preponderating talent (for where there is no

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particular method there are no disciples), and also the result of certain accidental circumstances which we will mention without any attempt at classifying in order of their importance. In 1719 Herculaneum was discovered beneath the ashes of Mount Vesuvius; in 1748 important excavations were begun on its site as well as on that of Pompeii, and the antiquities brought to light aroused great enthusiasm amongst artists, especially architects. In 1746 Madame de Pompadour succeeded in obtaining for her brother, then nineteen years old, the reversion of the post of *Directeur-Général des Bâtiments du Roi*, but at the same time she took the wise precaution of preparing him for that important position by making him travel in Italy for three years—from 1749 to 1751—under the guidance of the architect Soufflot, the engraver Charles Nicolas Cochin, and the Abbé Leblanc. We know too well the aversion of Cochin to the exponents of the *Rocaille* style to doubt that he urged his pupil François Poussin to follow the path of nature and simplicity. About the same time an impulse was given to the study of archæology, for the Comte de Caylus set to work to describe the engraved stones in the *cabinet du roi*, whilst Bouchardon made drawings of them. The “Recueil d'Antiquités” of De Caylus was



SMALL DESK. By Riesner. Reign of Louis XVI





## LOUIS XVI. STYLE

published between 1752 and 1767; the Abbé Barthélemy, keeper of the *Cabinet des Médailles*, became known through his essays on coins and medals, and began to collect the materials for his celebrated "Voyage du Jeune Anacharsis en Grèce"; in 1754 Winckelmann gave to the world his "Gedanken uber die Nachahmung der Griecheschen Werken" (Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Art), succeeded in 1764 by his "Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums" (History of Antique Art), and in 1766 by his "Monumente Antichi Inediti."

This is enough to prove that the spirit of what is called the Louis XVI. style was in the air long before the accession of that monarch, and we will now show that the taste for that phase of decoration really preceded it. In certain works of Charles André Boulle, for instance, the distinctive curve is entirely absent, except in certain details of *appliqué* copper work, which are, however, of a very sober character, so that the clearly defined outlines of the woodwork at first sight recall compositions half a century older. A typical example of this is the low marqueterie bookcase in the possession of M. le Comte de Castellane. A faithful follower of Boulle, Cressent produced some pieces of furniture, notably his cabinet

## FRENCH FURNITURE

of medals of the Bibliothèque Nationale, which only need to have a few of the lines straightened to become true specimens of the Louis XVI. style, and some of his best *armoires* are of a very simple angular design. When we come to Slodtz, who was equally enamoured of Italian exuberance of fancy and of severity of style, not even the slightest effort of imagination is necessary, and some designs for woodwork, such as those preserved in the *cabinet des estampes*, intended for furniture for the Ministère de la Marine, cannot fail at once to call up a vision of the final evolution of the century. The ebenists of the day were among the first to adopt the new fashion ; the cabinet for medals of Joubert in the Bibliothèque Nationale has the thick-set structure characteristic of so much of the work produced in the time of Louis XVI., although it was made but the year after the birth of that prince, and many tables and small *bureaux* dispersed in various collections, which were made during the same period, might easily be attributed to a later date. Lastly, it is interesting to remember that when Louis XVI. ascended the throne many of the buildings in what is called his style had already been erected in Paris, notably the *Garde-Meuble* and *Ecole Militaire* of the architect Gabriel and the *Monnaie* of Antoine.





ARMCHAIR covered with Beauvais tapestry.  
Louis XVI. South Kensington Museum



## LOUIS XVI. STYLE

It is, however, the furniture collected at Versailles and at Louveciennes by Madame du Barry in the five last years of the reign of Louis XV. which is most interesting from our particular point of view; for it can be looked at as a whole, and with its aid we can prove, as suggested above, that it consisted almost entirely of examples that were the glory of the Louis XVI. style. The celebrated favourite, who has been calumniated by all manner of unfounded stories, had the faults and good points of the child of the people she was. She was extravagant, fond of show, and ignorant. It must also be admitted that in the arrangement of her houses she adopted the latest fashion in vogue amongst the most advanced artists and amateurs of the Court, which brings us to the logical conclusion that when, in 1769, Louveciennes was given to her, furniture of simple structure had displaced that in the Rococo style. At that particular moment there was a kind of eclipse of great decorative artists; Jacques Caffieri, Meissonnier, and the Slodtzs had long been dead; Philippe Caffieri, though greatly advanced in years, continued to work according to the traditions of his father, but without his fame; and Riesener had but just signed his first work. When Jeanne Becu became Comtesse du Barry she wished to find an artist

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who would work exclusively for her, and she was advised to choose Gouthière as designer and decorator. There is nothing to show that he was known to the public before, but we may reasonably suppose that it was Gabriel, the first manager of Louveciennes, or Le Doux, who rebuilt the pavilion, both great admirers of the pseudo-antique style, who recommended their young collaborator, Gouthière, who was then but thirty years old, as the best person to decorate the interior of the building in the style they had chosen for its architecture.

This is, of course, but a mere suggestion, for scarcely anything is known of the life of this artist, who was said by his contemporaries to have acquired such extraordinary skill as a chaser as to have been able to make bronze look like gold. Between 1771 and 1773 he executed all, even the most minute, decorations in metal after the designs probably of Le Doux, Jean Denis Dugourc, architect to Monsieur, brother of the King, combined with some of his own, in this exquisite retreat of the last mistress of the King. Unfortunately, the royal accounts enumerate them at too great length for us to quote the lists here, for it would have been full of interest to a history of costly furniture to give the descriptions of such things as



LOUIS XVI SOFA. Palace of the Petit Trianon, Versailles



SOFA. Epoch Louis XVI. Palace of the Elysée, Paris



APPLIQUE. By Gouthière. Epoch Louis XVI. Grandjean Collection



## LOUIS XVI. STYLE

candelabra or sconces, wreathed with roses in flower and bud and myrtle foliage, that were probably modelled, to begin with, in wax and finished off separately with the greatest possible care ; of door-handles decorated with a wreath of roses, the monograph of the Comtesse, a rosary, and a sunflower ; of window fastenings shaped like a lyre or a flowering branch of lilies. All this leaves little doubt that Gouthière was also the chief designer of many furniture decorations in brass that are now lost. We have indeed a list of such designs in the *procès-verbal* drawn up in 1794 by the so-called *Commissaires artistes chez la nommée Dubarry*. For instance, amongst paintings by Watteau, Vanloo, Fragonard, Greuze, and Boucher, sculptures by Pajou, Falconnet, and Coysevox, and all manner of costly trinkets, we find mentioned a round table in Sèvres porcelain, divided into six pastoral subjects, and having in the centre a picture in enamel representing a concert in a seraglio, the whole upheld by a single bulbous support of Chinese wood decorated with gilded bronze ; a *commode* enriched with paintings in enamel and finely chased gilded bronze on a table of white marble ; a piano with a marqueterie top, &c.

The memoirs of various furniture-dealers add many other items to this legal list, any

## FRENCH FURNITURE

one of which if it came into the market now would be bid for at very high sums—an *armoire* and *secrétaire*, in one, of French porcelain, with a green ground strewn with flowers and sea pieces in miniature; a *commode* of antique lacquer, the central panel decorated with grotesque figures very richly dressed, with friezes inlaid with ebony and enriched with bronze, chased and gilded with dull gold, the whole surmounted by white marble; a French porcelain table with shelves, with a green ground and floral cartouches richly decorated with gilded bronze, the top covered with green velvet, on which stood gilded inkstands; with many other masterpieces of the ebenist and chaser, the description of which, however brief, gives us an opportunity of classifying an immense number of works in museums and private collections as imitations of the dainty, delicate, fairy-like creations that made up the furniture of the Châtelaine of Louveciennes. It will now be understood how impossible it was in a history of French furniture to dismiss hastily the short-lived but wonderful luxury that surrounded the beautiful Madame du Barry.

It must not, however, be supposed that Gouthière was the most celebrated of the makers of furniture of the latter part of the eighteenth century. He had one rival, who



CONSOLE. Beginning of Louis XVI Epoch. Garde Meuble National, Paris



CONSOLE. Epoch Louis XVI. Ministry of the Interior, Paris





## REIGN OF LOUIS XVI

in all histories of French decorative art under Louis XVI. is spoken of as chief amongst his contemporaries, and whose life is fortunately well known, proving him to have been equally skilful as an ebenist and a chaser. This was Riesener, whose career is, moreover, of special interest, in that it makes it possible to trace accurately the transition between the *rocaille* and so-called Classic styles, as well as the decadence of the Louis XVI. style when France was verging on imperialism.

Born at Gladbach in Germany, in 1735, Riesener went to Paris when still quite young, and became apprenticed to an ebenist named Oeben, whose career presents one of the problems such as we have met with again and again in the course of this study. This Oeben was, there is every reason to suppose, of German extraction, though his Christian names were Jean François and he enjoyed all the advantages of French nationality. He had a namesake, Simon Oeben or Hobenne, who was also ebenist to the King, and after the deaths of both of them their widows carried on their businesses, so that it would not be surprising to hear of two widows Oeben living at the same time, if we did not happen to know that one of them married again, becoming the wife of Riesener. There is yet another puzzle—the works signed with the name of Oeben,

## FRENCH FURNITURE

such as the corner-cupboards of the great *bureau* of the Jones Collection at South Kensington, are of very simple construction, recalling the manner of Boulle, as modified by that of Cressent, but with decorative bronzes greatly influenced by the Italian Rococo style. There is nothing to explain the favour shown by the Marquise de Pompadour to the master of Riesener, and second rank alone would be accorded to him if the inventory of the workshops of Jean François Oeben did not happen to reveal his share in the completion of what was perhaps the most remarkable piece of furniture produced in the eighteenth century, the so-called *Grand Bureau du Roi*. Exactly what part was done by young Riesener, and what by Oeben himself, as well as by the excellent sculptors who collaborated with them, Duplessis, Winant, and Hervieux, can never now be determined. That Riesener's work was very important must, however, be admitted, for the widow of the master married the pupil in 1767, whilst the *bureau* begun in 1760 was not delivered until 1769, when it bore the signature of Riesener only.

The artist repeated this great work—which a few years ago passed into the Louvre Collection—no less than four times. A mere cursory glance at it is enough for recognition of its simple grace of outline and the beauty





SMALL DESK. By Weisweiler. LouisXVI Epoch







EMPIRE ARMCHAIR. Palace of Fontainebleau

## REIGN OF LOUIS XVI

of its decorative bronzes, which culminate at the upper angles in two recumbent nymphs holding up girandoles, whilst in the centre is a fine clock framed in a wealth of flowers above which are two sportive Cupids. The marqueterie representing various emblems is worthy of the rest of the design, and inside the woodwork is a clever mechanical contrivance for making all the drawers come out at once. It may indeed be said that this masterpiece of the cabinet-maker is more perfect and more thoroughly French in taste, in spite of the German origin of its two chief creators, than anything of the kind ever produced. It is typical of the transitional moment when craftsmen were still enjoying the heritage bequeathed by the masters of the Louis XIV. period, and the enthusiasm of the exponents of the *Rocaille* craze was beginning to be tempered by the wisdom that came from the study of the antique.

The *Grand Bureau du Roi* must not, however, be looked upon as an example of the new departure. The first work signed by Riesener unmistakably betrays his faithfulness to the traditions of Cressent and Jacques Caffieri, which he was, however, very soon to abandon, for the style patronised by Madame du Barry. In 1777, as proved by a cylindrical *bureau* in the *Mobilier National*, he aimed

## FRENCH FURNITURE

merely at simple yet accurate grace of line—that is to say, with him the groping after a combination of the antique with the style of Oeben lasted only long enough for him to produce a beautiful table at Trianon, with the symbols of geography and astronomy in marqueterie, his indecision being revealed only in the over-ornate foliage finishing off the fluted and too slender supports. From that time until his death in 1806 he never faltered in his chosen path which Marie Antoinette and the people of France continued to prefer long after the fall of the favourite who had been his patron so long. He was able to lay aside the burin of the chaser that he could wield so skilfully, to devote himself entirely to the humbler work of the ebenist, in which he was equally able to excel, supplying the Court with quantities of costly furniture, and less wealthy purchasers with works of comparatively little cost, but highly valued on account of their unique grace of form. This, of course, led to his having many imitators, so that it is often difficult to know whether to attribute to the master certain pieces not bearing his mark; the exact resemblance between the decorative metal-work of signed and anonymous furniture is not sufficient proof of authorship, for, as is well known, ebenists often bought metal ornaments







CHEST OF DRAWERS. First Empire. Garde Meuble National, Paris

## REIGN OF LOUIS XVI

already chased after the designs of such masters as Duplessis, to add to the furniture they had made. Riesener himself certainly sometimes did this even for costly pieces of work.

We cannot undertake to enumerate, still less to describe, his uncontested work, but we may add that he often adopted the chess-board style of marqueterie, the squares being filled in with rose-tracery, and that he combined mahogany with Sèvres porcelain. During the Revolution he produced such works as the *Tricoteuse de la Reine*, belonging to the Comte de Camondo, the slender grace of which was already prophetic of the Empire. He never foresaw the overthrow of society, nor did he understand it when it came—he wanted to keep in his workshop the costly pieces of furniture he still retained when the monarchy was overthrown, and even bought back some of his own work at the sales of the Royal effects, always hoping that the good old times would return. His fortune, which during the ten years of his prosperity had risen to a million, dwindled away, and he—whose first masterpiece had been welcomed with acclamation throughout France at the depraved and effeminate time when the youthful Countess du Barry, with her little negro Zamor and the canary Fifi, was beginning her reign—died in

## FRENCH FURNITURE

comparative poverty the year of the Battle of Jena.

What we have said about Riesener borrowing copper ornaments of which he was not the author, to decorate his furniture, ought not really to detract from his merit. Collaboration between artists was a constant practice in all the best periods of French furniture—indeed, we may even say that it was the cause of their grandeur. It is a great mistake on the part of modern artists, and one much to be regretted, to suppose that working together diminishes the glory of each individual. The result is most good designers restrict themselves to the production of paintings, statues, plans of houses, &c., and look upon it almost as a disgrace to work side by side with some clever ebenist or expert chaser, to whom they will accord no rank but that of a craftsman. As long as artists hold out for this senseless idea of an aristocracy of art, the public will have to be content with reproductions of old styles or characterless innovations, and if this vanity, like all other feelings of the kind, is the result of ignorance of history and of the principles that govern it, books such as this one may serve a further purpose than merely to guide those interested in their subjects. Not only did the great Riesener borrow, as we have seen, from contemporary metal founders

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## REIGN OF LOUIS XVI

and chasers, but also, in spite of his having been—as proved by his marqueterie work—a remarkably clever designer, he thought no shame of using the drawings of architects such as Jacques Gondouin, who was director of the royal residences. Moreover, Gouthière executed designs by Le Barbier and Boizot, as attested by inscriptions cut in the wood of certain pieces of furniture, and it is no longer doubtful that he aided the ebenists Saunier, Leleu, and Pasquier at the *châteaux* of Madame du Barry, and there seems to be some reason to suppose that he also worked with Riesener.

It would be unfair to pass over without a word of notice Jean François Leleu and Claude Charles Saunier, who lived at the end of the eighteenth century, and took high rank on account of the whimsical, though, it must be owned, somewhat restricted, imagination they displayed in their marqueterie work, of which the lavish use of copper was a chief characteristic. Their contemporary Martin Carlin was specially skilful in lacquer-work, which he decorated with such beautiful bronzes that one is tempted to ask whether they were not really from the hand of Gouthière, or of his best pupil Thomire. Carlin worked with Riesener at the furniture of the *Château de Saint Cloud*, bought by

## FRENCH FURNITURE

Marie Antoinette in 1785. Fortunately, a good many examples of his skill are preserved in the Louvre and the Wallace Collection, proving by their charming delicacy of execution how fitted was their author to cater for the caprices of the graceful and beautiful Queen. Pages would be filled with the mere list of the names of the ebenists and sculptors who flourished during the last years of the glories of the monarchy, and brought the Louis XVI. style into high repute. We must, however, content ourselves with naming Montigny, Levasseur, and Séverin, who imitated the old motives of Boulle with a skill that has led to mistakes; Guillaume Beneman, who was one of the first to make the use of mahogany fashionable, and who is chiefly famous for his collaboration with such rare masters of decoration as the sculptors Hauré and Martin; the inlayers Girard, Kemp, and Bertrand; the chasers Bardin and Thomire; and the gilder Galle.

The mention of Beneman indicates that the task of tracing the evolution of French taste is nearing its conclusion. No doubt we might note *en passant* certain clumsy architectural ornaments designed of recent years, certain affected freaks in copper, in which the scrupulous attention to trifles of Gouthière is mimicked without being under-

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CHEVAL-GLASS. First Empire. Garde Meuble National, Paris





## FOREIGN INFLUENCES

stood, certain lifeless and naïve imitations of antique Greek, Roman, and even Egyptian motives imperfectly comprehended ; but these are mere mistakes of little importance which should herald a revival, not a rapid decadence, such as that now about to take place. The necessary men were there, most of them in the prime of their age and of their powers, and it is the men who are the real factors, in spite of fashion, in all the great art periods. All we have hitherto written goes to prove this, and that to bring about the artistic catastrophe with which we shall end this study, the extraordinary coincidence of three historical fatalities—which we will name before we comment upon them—was needed. The first and least important was the invasion during the last eight years of the reign of Louis XVI. of the workshops of the ebenists of the Faubourg St. Antoine by Germans, who came, not, like Oeben and Riesener, to learn their art in Paris, but to turn their national skill and taste to account, by sharing in the high prices paid in France for articles of luxury. Unfortunately, the French Court was attracted by the foreign novelties introduced ; a kind of art paralysis ensued, and the political events which supervened led to the mischief having become irreparable by the time a new and luxurious court

## FRENCH FURNITURE

gathered about the Emperor Napoleon I. The second fatality was the suddenness with which the Revolution, in its zeal for universal enfranchisement, destroyed the corporations with their protective privileges, their stringent rules for the careful execution of commissions, and their regulations as to serving a long and obligatory apprenticeship to a trade, before the right could be won of selling the work done. By the suppression in a single sentence of an institution which, we admit, had its tyrannical and unjust side, the competition and rivalry so prolific of good results were arrested, and the salutary collaboration of artists of different gifts was put an end to, with the result that the door was opened for the manufacture of cheap objects of luxury, and an element of demoralisation was introduced from which the whole civilised world is still suffering, far more than is generally supposed. The case would not, however, perhaps have been so desperate but for the rise of the Empire, which, with the absorbing interest of its magnificent campaigns, withdrew public attention from the creations of artists, and brought all the vitiated talent which had survived the ancient monarchy under the control of a single man of iron will, who was educated during those years of Republican supremacy when to own beauty

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JEWEL CABINET OF QUEEN MARIE ANTOINETTE.  
Designed by Schwerdfeger, Degault, Roentgen and Thomire.  
Palace of Versailles





## EMPIRE STYLE

as well as wealth was to fall under the suspicion of being an aristocrat.

After Beneman, then, the decline set in rapidly. His mahogany coffers would be nothing but clumsy chests were it not for the decoration added to them by his French collaborators. The fellow countrymen who gathered about did little more than crudely emphasise his peculiar interpretation of the pseudo-antique style, their aim being rigidly to suppress the affected but charming naturalism of the French school. Joseph Stoeckel, Birklé, Charles Richter, Feuerstein, Peter Schmitz, Gaspard Schneider, Frost, Bergeman, Blucheidner, and many others were favoured by the Queen because they spoke her native language, but the most celebrated of the foreigners were Weisweiler, who worked chiefly at furniture for ladies' boudoirs, Schwerdfeger, the chief author of the famous Jewel Cabinet of Marie Antoinette, which we reproduce here, and which would be at once assigned to the Empire period, without the lifelike caryatides with which it was decorated by Thomire, and Roentgen, better known by his Christian name of David, or as David of Luneville, although he really came from Neuwied, near Coblenz. The last-named merits special notice, not so much on account

## FRENCH FURNITURE

of his art talent, as the position he and his fellow countryman Beneman managed to obtain at Court. It is impossible to help admiring the audacity with which he competed with French artists of commercial acumen inferior to his own, for he managed to be manufacturer of furniture to the Queen, and a member of the Municipality of Paris, without giving up his workshops at Neuwied, where, moreover, he spent most of his time.

The Revolution put an almost complete stop to the production of articles of luxury. Deprived of commissions from the royal family and the aristocracy, many artists were reduced to complete inactivity and poverty; others went abroad to seek new employers elsewhere and the protection France no longer accorded to skill and experience. The destruction or dispersion of the fine examples of art-work produced under the monarchy still further aggravated the situation. It is true that some few members of the government made laudable efforts to have the masterpieces which were taken from the churches and palaces preserved as the most valuable heirlooms of the nation. It was for this reason that at the public sale of the effects of Madame du Barry two pieces of furniture were kept back; and Alexandre Lenoir filled the *Musée des Petits Augustins* with

## EMPIRE STYLE

treasures, but nothing could long prevail against the need of money to raise armies with which to resist the European coalition. It was an ominous sign of the times when a large number of valuable works of art passed into foreign possession under pretext of their being exchanged for arms and ammunition without any profit accruing to the Republic.

Napoleon found but a small group of decorators who had come safely through the terrible times of the Revolution, most of whom, though they had not lost the skill of brilliant days gone by, had ceased to turn to nature for inspiration, surrounded as they were by an artificial society, which aped the manners of the ancient Romans and judged art entirely by the standard of the painter David. Those who tried to remain faithful to the traditions of their youth died, as did Riesener, in obscurity. The rest had to adapt themselves to the taste of the new Cæsar, who cared nought for the ideal or the symbolic, but only for matter-of-fact, historical records. Prud'hon laid aside his facile brush to make feeble designs for furniture, and to keep Thomire supplied with motives for reproduction in bronze. The brothers Jacob, who had learnt cabinet-making from their father under Louis XVI., and had worked for the Convention in 1793, now gave them-

## FRENCH FURNITURE

selves up to the manufacture of massive mahogany furniture, that Thomire decorated with slim antique gods and goddesses, or with palm- and laurel-leaves. The younger of the brothers retired in 1804, leaving Jacob Desmalter to inundate France and Europe with productions which, however perfect from a technical point of view, were altogether unpleasing and unsatisfactory as works of art. Nearly all the drawings for this furniture were supplied by the architect Percier and his inseparable collaborator Fontaine. Many fine works bear witness to the talent and refined taste of these two masters, leaving no doubt that they did violence to their own convictions in order to meet the requirements of a public and a ruler whose taste was perverted in an extraordinary manner by the revolution of ideas that had recently taken place. There is no doubt that in more peaceful times, under a prince less economical in his personal luxuries, they would have been able to rescue French furniture from sinking below the level of that produced by Germans in the best time of the monarchy; indeed, one may even imagine that their own predilection for the best features of the Renaissance might have led to a healthy and essentially French revival, for there was a tendency amongst the general public to revert



## GOTHIC REVIVAL

to the old national sources of inspiration. This is proved by the so-called Romantic, that is to say, the Gothic, movement which took place soon after the fall of Napoleon, but which, so far at least as decorative art was concerned, did not result in a style with any vitality, chiefly because of the increasing incapacity of the craftsmen, who had now sunk to the position of mere workmen, and also because of the general want of taste amongst a people whose artistic education had been completely neglected for a quarter of a century.

France still retains the traditions—strangely degenerate and unprogressive, it is true—of the furniture designed in the Louis XIV. period. It is impossible to predict when a decisive movement will take place which will reform, from an artistic point of view, the decoration of the home. It is, however, certain that such a movement will arise, for history teaches us that a renaissance invariably follows a decadence, but she teaches us also that great reactions only come about under the inspiration of some grand idea dominating the national spirit, combined with a general conjunction of all forms of talent. This is a lesson all might well take to heart.



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