

# FRENCH TAPESTRY PAINTING

FIRST PAPER



IN response to the general expression of interest in the subject of the art known as French tapestry painting, it is proposed to devote a few articles to the careful explanation of the method, which in reality is very simple and is readily acquired by

an artist having some previous knowledge of drawing and color. The true art of tapestry painting consists in the imitation of the woven goods by means of applying liquid dyes to a woolen canvas, manufactured to imitate exactly the Gobelin stitch, the colors being afterward fixed and made indelible by the action of steam. It is claimed, therefore, that the main difference, apart from the merit of the work, between the woven and the painted piece, is that in the first case the threads are dyed before being woven, and in the second case afterward. The advantage, of course, of this painting process is its small cost compared with the product of the looms. The main items to be considered in reckoning the value of a painted tapestry is the amount of time it will take to execute, and the price of the canvas employed as the ground, which must be all wool and of the best quality, and which in this country costs seven dollars and a half a yard, fifty-six inches wide.

THE necessary outfit, including the set of Grénié dyes, and medium, about a dozen brushes, glass palette, and a few small jars in which to mix the washes, costs considerably under five dollars. The brushes are made specially for this kind of painting, and are of bristle, short and stiff. The dyes are put up in a concentrated form, and require much dilution with medium and water for ordinary use. Until beginners realize the strength of the colors they are apt to be wasteful by putting out much too great a quantity on the palette, and also are liable to make their painting at first too dark and heavy. As they come from the laboratory the dyes appear strong and crude, but when once their possibilities are understood the advantage gained in being able to obtain them pure and unmixed will be appreciated. Every conceivable shade and tone of color can be produced by their means.

IT is much better, if in any way possible, to take a few lessons in order to see practically the handling of the dyes. However, where this is not feasible, the best plan for a beginner who has procured an outfit and feels in absolute ignorance of how next to proceed, is probably to take a simple flower or conventional border, which may be put afterward to some decorative use, and in attempting this to become acquainted somewhat with the mixing and applying of the dyes. It will be advisable to have a spare piece of canvas at hand on which to try the tints, experimenting with various combinations of color until a satisfactory result is gained.

IT may be helpful to suggest some artistic and useful mixtures for ordinary purposes. For greens mix in various proportions indigo, Indian yellow and sanguine; indigo, yellow and cochineal; also emerald green and yellow used extremely pale. The best method usually is to paint in the shadows, allow them to thoroughly dry, then put a wash of the high light over the whole form and where necessary to work up the half tones with a complementary shade while this wash is still slightly moist. To put in the half tones successfully in this way, however, requires some experience with the dyes, and great care in preserving the high lights pure, but the result, if good, is a very soft blending of the tones. For yellow or golden coloring use for the lightest shades either yellow pure and very pale or with a little touch of ponceau added, and brown with some yellow added for the shadows. For blue objects make the shadows of a greenish blue, employing indigo, and mix for the wash ultramarine blue and emerald green very much diluted, possibly working a little pure sanguine into the half tones. Make the shadows of delicate pinks, quite grayish, in the first instance, and use for the wash a light shade of either ponceau, sanguine or rose, according to taste. Where a large surface is to be covered mix a sufficient quantity of color in a jar, diluting it with medium and water in equal parts. The medium must be used freely, and none of the dyes applied without it. The importance of this rule lies in the fact that the addition of the medium is necessary in order that the steaming shall properly fix the colors and render the painting indelible. The highest lights are best obtained by gently scraping off the necessary amount of color carefully with the rounded blade of a pen-knife; of course this must not be done until the wash is perfectly dry.





HERE is a definite method to be followed in painting faces with the tapestry dyes in order to gain the best results. Certain fixed rules can be given for the mixing and applying of the colors, a slight variation in the proportions of the tints employed producing the requisite gradations for any shade of complexion ordinarily portrayed. The method when once grasped is extremely simple, but it is better, if possible, to have a few practical lessons or, at least, to see a face put in by some one experienced in the art, because although the directions can be easily given in writing, the average beginner lacks the necessary judgment and confidence to follow them out to a successful issue. The appearance of the painting in its various stages is sufficiently unusual to be rather startling to anyone who has no previous knowledge as to how the final result is to be obtained.

IT is a good plan for anyone who is unable to take lessons, and yet anxious to learn this art, to prepare themselves for the undertaking of any large figure subject, by painting a number of heads on small pieces of canvas, until a certain amount of experience and facility has been gained. Each one should be finished as well as possible, even though it may be apparently spoiled during its earlier progress, for, as a matter of fact, if only the drawing itself be good, the actual painting may be more easily corrected and brought out right, in the end, than would be at first supposed. The head must be carefully transferred and drawn in outline with a finely pointed crayon; a Conté No. 2 answers the purpose very well. The painting is begun by blocking in the markings and shadows of the face with pure sanguine, mixed with medium and a little water, using the same still further diluted for the more delicate half-tones, and leaving the broad lights untouched. For putting in the features of a small face a very tiny stiff brush should be employed in order to be able to model them with sufficient accuracy. At the conclusion of this first stage, the face should stand out in red monochrome, the drawing and expression being correctly and boldly indicated. The pupils of the eyes, if blue, must not be laid in with sanguine, but should be painted in directly with their local color. For this purpose use gray mixed with ultramarine. When the first painting is quite dry the wash for the general tone of the complexion should be laid on. This wash must be very pale, and may be made of sanguine mixed with about two-thirds medium and one-third water. The whole face, with the exception of the eyes, must be covered, and the dye well scrubbed in, the canvas being thoroughly soaked with it. While the tint is partially drying the following mixture may be prepared: Indian yellow and indigo, making rather a vivid grass green, and the same colors further diluted and rendered slightly bluer in tone. Then, while the wash is still damp, but not wet enough for the color to run and be unmanageable when applied, work these greens into the shadows and half-tones of the face, having previously touched in some ponceau for the coloring of the cheeks. The result ought to be a counteracting of the red hues, and the production of transparent and pearly flesh tones. Allow this painting to become thoroughly dry, not touching it again at the same sitting.

THE highest lights are obtained by means of the knife, and whatever painting up, strengthening or alteration may be necessary, is to be accomplished by means of the same colors already employed, but mixed in still paler shades, adding green where the tone is too red, and sanguine where it is too cold or too green, being especially careful at this stage not to work in too much color.

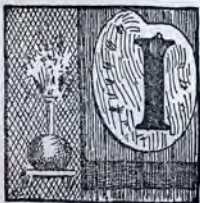
For golden hair, use for the shadows brown with some yellow added, and for the wash, pale yellow toned with ponceau. For brown and very dark hair, paint the shadows with the brown dye, and make the wash of a pale shade of indigo, toned with brown, according to the color required, remembering that black hair has almost always cold, bluish high lights. Where the wash for the hair is made warm in tone, work up the half-tones with rather a cold shade, and vice versa.

TO conclude with a few words of general advice: Be cautious in the handling of the knife; beginners are apt to depend too much on the use of it. Paint broadly, omitting for decorative work of this kind all minute detail. Be careful to keep the tints pale, for the dyes are very strong, and a picture can easily be strengthened; it is better at first to err on the side of getting the painting too light rather than to risk making it dark and heavy.



# FRENCH TAPESTRY PAINTING

## THIRD PAPER



**I**N the second paper on this subject the method of painting faces with the tapestry dyes was treated of, with the understanding that the rules laid down were to be considered, to a considerable extent, fixed and arbitrary. The following advice,

however, as to the mode of procedure in painting a pictorial subject, is to be regarded, on the contrary, merely as being suggestions which are the outcome of practical experience, and likely, therefore, to be of value to a beginner, who, growing in expertness and facility, may afterward modify the counsel here given to suit individual taste, or the requirements of particular cases.

**A** TYPICAL subject might possibly consist of a shepherd and shepherdess, with landscape background, including a piece of water, with, perhaps, some old, broken, moss-grown stone wall, or possibly a fountain, having for ornamentation a group of cupids in stonework. Boucher and Watteau composed many such pictures, which are admirably suited for reproduction in tapestry. When the subject has been carefully outlined the painting may be started by laying in the sky. Where the heads are relieved against it, this should be made an invariable rule, otherwise so much care has to be taken lest the coloring of the hair or the shadowed outline of the face become washed up, since it is necessary to make the sky tint very wet, and to bring it, of course, right up to the edges. In laying on the tone rapidly, the pale blue may even be allowed to go slightly over the outline of the hair, and very sharply around the drawing of the face, using a smaller brush for this purpose, and guarding against making the color accidentally any lighter, for this will give an unpleasant halo effect. Next, the faces, hands and feet, if they are bare, should be blocked in, as directed in the article last month, and while this is drying the time may be filled in by painting the shadows and half-tones of any white drapery in the costumes, using the grey dye sufficiently diluted. A grey may be mixed with Indian yellow, indigo, cochineal and a touch of sanguine, but some experience is required to learn just the right proportions to use in order that it may steam properly. It is wise always to put the white and lightest portions of a piece in first, where it is desired to keep the coloring very delicate, because the expanse of white canvas still left makes the tones seem darker than they will eventually appear when the rest of the painting is finished, and lessens the probability of getting the tints too heavy. No local wash should ever be put over the high lights for white objects, the creamy tone of the canvas left untouched giving just the soft effect required. Directly the shadows of the faces are dry, the painting of the heads may be continued, and the hair also should be put in.

**T**HE second day's painting would probably begin by laying in the shadows for the principal portions of the costumes of the figures. The touching up of the faces should be left until the picture is nearly finished, otherwise a second strengthening of them might be necessary, through lack of the necessary judgment as to how the rest of the painting would affect their coloring. So, likewise, whatever working-up may be necessary for the drapery after the first painting has been allowed to dry, should be left until all the landscape, background and foreground be laid in and the canvas completely covered. With increasing practice and experience it will be found that less and less will be required in touching up and repainting, and that very much, especially in the landscape, can be put in entirely in one painting. Directions for the treatment of the landscape in a tapestry were published in this department for last May, and may be studied with advantage in connection with the advice now given.

**T**HE characteristic coloring for the pastoral costumes in the class of subjects referred to are pale pinks, blues and yellows, with subdued browns, reds and purplish tones introduced principally in the costumes of the male figures. The general color effect is greatly improved where the pale tints of the principal drapery are repeated in deeper touches of related tones either in the lesser details of the costume, in a ribbon or flower, or possibly in the shades employed in the man's dress. Greyish or fawn-colored tones may be advantageously used for his garments in conjunction with deep wine-colored or greenish-blue shades, repeating and emphasizing in this way, as suggested, the dainty pinks and blues in the draperies of his lady-love. Wherever possible, introduce white ruffling or kerchief directly next to the flesh tones of the face and hands.

# FRENCH TAPESTRY PAINTING

## THE PROCESS OF STEAMING



WHEN the painting of a tapestry in the French dyes is finished, it is necessary to fix the colors by the action of steam in order to render them indelible. The process is sufficiently simple for an amateur to be able to

undertake it successfully and with but little trouble. If the artist should not possess a regular studio, the apparatus may be set up in kitchen or outhouse, or in any convenient place, provided there is not sufficient draft to run the risk of condensing the steam, for it must be borne in mind that steam never causes moisture until it becomes condensed. The action of dry steam fixes the dyes, but in condensing it would ruin the tapestry by making the colors run.

The apparatus required consists of a cylinder made of tin or zinc, a boiler, and either a gas or an oil stove; the former method of heating, being more reliable and less trouble to manage, should preferably be chosen when it can be conveniently used.

The cylinder, which is open at both ends, may measure from twelve to fourteen inches in diameter, and for ordinary use about sixty inches in height; for very large pieces of work it can be provided with an extra piece to give the necessary additional height, made to slip into the top and fitting tightly in place, but which is removable when not required. The boiler should be about twelve inches in depth and made so that the cylinder fits into it easily. It should stand upon feet so that the stove can be placed beneath it. In preparing to steam, fill the boiler about two-thirds full of water and place a piece of soft old toweling over the top of the boiler before putting the cylinder into it in position; this is to avoid danger from the splashing of the water, and to prevent the escape of steam where the cylinder slips into place. Be sure to put in enough water, as directed, for the results of its boiling away altogether would be disastrous.

THE tapestries which are to be steamed must be sewn together to make one continuous piece, which, for a cylinder of the dimensions named, may be in length a yard and a half, or slightly longer, and in width from three to three and a half yards. This is then rolled loosely so that in hanging the layers of canvas are quite separate, not touching each other nor the sides of the cylinder, in order that the steam may have free and equal circulation. Fasten the roll by means of string inserted with a packing needle and tied to a cross-bar, which fits over the top of the cylinder and thus holds the tapestries suspended in place. Throw a thick Turkish towel, old woolen shawl, or piece of coarse blanketing over the top of the cylinder, by which means the steam is allowed to find an outlet, but escapes slowly. Everything being satisfactorily arranged, the stove may be lighted. The time allowed for steaming is from an hour to an hour and a half and upward, counting from when the water begins to boil. Too short a period will not properly fix the dyes, and too long a steaming bleaches out the paler tones and makes the deeper coloring disproportionately heavy and strong. It is important that the water be kept boiling fast during the whole time allowed, otherwise the steam might condense and trouble ensue.

THE allotted period having elapsed, the business of taking the tapestries out must be undertaken. This should be done deliberately, without either dallying or haste. Being provided with a pair of thick gloves to prevent the hands being scorched by the hot steam, turn out the gas, remove the top covering, and standing upon a step-ladder or a chair, seize the cross-bar in the middle and lift the tapestries bodily out. Cut the fastenings of the roll, separate the pieces and hang them up to get cool. It is better not to fold tapestries for some little while after they are steamed, for the canvas seems to retain a certain stiffness just at first which causes the appearance of scratch marks where the piece is doubled over. After several months they become perfectly soft and may be folded without injury, although at all times it is perhaps better to roll them on a stick.