AN INTERESTING NEEDLEWORK DESIGN EVOLVED FROM AN EMBROIDERY DETAIL IN DA VINCI'S PAINTING OF "THE LAST SUPPER": BY KATHRINE SANGER BRINLEY

THERE is something peculiarly appealing about the embroidered linens of the Renaissance which in their preservation through centuries tell today a tale of craftsmanship and patience as naïve to twentieth-century minds as a Northern Saga. Embroidered regal robes and priestly vestments of old time still exhale an odor of pomp and ceremony, of something above the horizon of daily tasks in simple lives; but the embroidered linens wrought five hundred years ago, essentially domestic in character, speak of life with the great majority, of love and sorrow, of rain and sunshine, of winter and summer; they stir the housewife's heart, and touch in an intimate way the feminine in us. One fingers lovingly, even reverently, some bit of cross-stitching upon a creamy cloth of flax worked in fourteen hundred, perhaps, and a sad vision of our machine-made linens five hundred years hence flashes through the mind. In this old hand-woven material each thread has life, born, as it were, of its passage between a living thumb and finger, which gives to the finished tissue a character inherently different from the mechanically woven article. The honored position accorded to linen in the lives of ancient peoples, Assyrians, Egyptians and Jews, and lost in modern times, is largely accounted for by the wiping out of the handloom. "I have decked my bed with fine linen of Egypt," says King Solomon in his "Book of Proverbs;" and we know that in his time linen symbolized purity; it was the especial material for kingly and priestly garments, and for the shrouding of the sacred dead. That the linen ground was often decorated with needlework in colored threads is vouched for in many ancient writings; in Greek and Roman classics; and most interesting of all, perhaps, in many archaeological remains which the past one hundred and fifty years have brought to light. This ancient manner of enriching linen with color seems to have continued without interruption until modern times. One finds almost without exception that in the Orient, Spain, Germany, England or Italy, fifteenth-century linens both for house and personal use, even altar linens of the Church itself, were embroidered in color. Such widespread use bespeaks a prevailing love of color among all nations and classes at that time. This habitual employment of it comes as something of a shock to the modern needleworker, for today a sense of fitness seems to demand that in certain articles, ornament as well as ground should be white; but during the Renaissance in Italy it was not so; and it is with the needlework of that storied age and land we have to do.
"THE LAST SUPPER" : BY LEONARDO DA VINCI : FROM THE EMBROIDERED LINEN ON THE TABLE IS TAKEN THE NEEDLEWORK DESIGN DESCRIBED AND ILLUSTRATED IN THE ACcompanyING ARTICLE.
SHOWING FRAME AND METHOD OF EMBROIDERING THE DESIGN TAKEN FROM DA VINCI'S FAMOUS PAINTING, "THE LAST SUPPER."
NEEDLEWORK DESIGNS FROM OLD PAINTINGS

If we will turn again to the Italian pictures of the Golden Age we shall find the use of colored ornament upon linen in many important canvases. Paul Veronese's "Marriage at Cana" hanging in the Louvre sets forth a colored border in the table-cloth. The most striking example in this Gallery, however, and the most valuable because of its design, is furnished us in d'Oggiono's copy of Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper." The great Milan fresco was finished about fourteen hundred and ninety-eight, and d'Oggiono, one of Leonardo's pupils, made of it many copies, which are the only ones that give us today anything like a true impression of what the magnificent Santa Maria delle Grazie must have been before disintegration set in. The Louvre copy shows a clear pattern in dark color upon each end of the long white table-cloth. Even after passing through two painters’ hands the design still bespeaks the loom and the needle. Its lines show plainly a rectangular character that was forced upon the needle-worker by the nature of the linen ground. Cross-stitch, one feels instinctively, was used for its production; and so faithfully is the woman's needlework reproduced by the man's brush that it seems there must have been a table-cloth thus embroidered which Leonardo copied. Recalling that this fresco was ordered by the Dominican monks for the decoration of their refectory, it is quite possible that such a cloth draped one of the long tables therein, at which the good Brothers sat for their daily meals, and where the son of "Caterina" worked for a great part of ten years. The design itself is worthy of consideration. At first glance it seems just another slightly grotesque treatment of ordinary forms, after a manner of those times. But it is something more than that; it is symbolic, and moreover it is most appropriate for the use to which it was put,—a test of good craftsmanship. The units are a horse, a chalice and a lucerna or oil lamp, (the light of the people of Italy even today), conventionalized. One calls to mind references to the horse in the Hebrew scriptures, and of many those in the first and last chapters of the Prophecy of Zechariah and in the sixth chapter of the Revelation of St. John come with greatest significance. The horse is there used in a prefiguring of Judgment, and in symbolizing the final triumph of Christ. The chalice, of course, is a symbol of Christ's religion and the lamp stands for the Light of the Gospel, or Christ the Light of the World. These three units are so composed that a design of real decorative value results.

Many Italian linens of the Renaissance are worked in varieties of cross-stitch, generally those which are the same on both sides, a stranded red silk of purplish hue being almost always used. English and German examples of the same period show a prevailing use of many colors. These are as a rule much less pleasing, lacking the charm which comes of the simpler treatment. The stitchery was employed in two ways: as a background which left the pattern in the white linen, or for the production of the pattern itself, leaving the background white. Cross-stitch was often combined with stroke stitch and straight stitch or point Lance, to give ease and variety of effect. Patterns really ornamental were beautifully set forth in these simple stitches. Time and patience being so much rarer things now than in Leonardo's day one would scarcely attempt to work the pattern here given upon the fine linen, and in the minute stitches that "Mona Lisa,” for instance, would have employed; but with a reasonable expenditure of thought, leisure and good material, one may produce something so akin to those lovely bits of Renaissance handiwork that it will prove real adornment for the home.

Three stitches are used in the worked part of the design reproduced: double Italian cross-stitch, being the same on both sides; straight stitch, much used in old work, and stroke stitch, as old as the first needle. If it is to be embroidered upon linen, the pattern must be transferred just as it appears in the accom-
panying working design—squares and all; if upon a canvas, one must proceed by counting threads, as in ordinary cross-stitch work.

Double Italian cross-stitch, a cross, framed on three sides by straight stitches, and exactly alike on both sides of the material, at first glance seems difficult, but it is quite the contrary in reality. To learn it, mark off six squares of any size in a line upon your linen, and with a threaded needle in hand, follow these directions: Insert your needle in the upper right-hand corner of the first square, and run it in and out of the material in a slanting direction, bringing it out exactly in the point of the lower left-hand corner; draw the silk through carefully until the unknotted end is just even with the ground,—this takes the place of a knot and is subsequently covered in the working. Now you are ready to begin the stitch. First insert your needle exactly in the upper right-hand corner of the first square, and bring it out at the lower left-hand corner, from the same hole through which the silk first passed; a slanting stitch results, which hides the running stitches. Next insert your needle exactly in the upper left-hand corner and bring it out exactly in the lower right-hand corner. A straight stitch results, which frames the
NEEDLEWORK DESIGNS FROM OLD PAINTINGS

left side of the square. Now insert your needle exactly in the lower left-hand corner of the square, and bring it out exactly in the lower right-hand corner. This produces a straight stitch that frames the bottom of the square. Repeat now these three stitches in their proper order until the end of the row of squares is reached. Then you complete the work by a return journey, as follows: your silk being now in the lower right-hand corner of the last square, insert your needle exactly in the upper right-hand corner, and bring it out again in the lower right-hand corner through the same hole the silk is already in. This makes a straight stitch on the right and wrong sides which frames the right-hand side of the square. Lastly insert the needle in the upper left-hand corner and bring it out in the lower left-hand corner—from which point in each square you started; this completes the cross and produces the third straight stitch on the wrong side. Continue this until the entire row of crosses is completed. When once understood this stitch works up very quickly and is much more effective than the ordinary variety of cross-stitch. A strand silk should be used.

To adapt it to a design, the accompanying one for instance, requires a little planning so that the thread may be carried from one row to another as continuously as possible, but otherwise the only thing to remember is that the upper row will always be open at the top. The missing stitch, if desired, may be put in during the first return journey, or stroke stitch may be used. This kind of work is best done in the hand. For purposes of reproduction the example here given is shown mounted in a frame. If the work is held vertically, so to speak, and worked toward one it will go much more easily. For the solid parts of the design, straight stitch is best; that is, ordinary “over and over” stitches taken through the material and laid vertically close together. All the small parts of the design which cannot be done in the cross-stitch, and the straight lines of the border, are worked with stroke stitch—that is, ordinary stitches adapted in length to the space to be covered and worked a stroke at a time. By using this stitch in two journeys, one of which covers the open spaces left by the other, a continuous line on both sides of the material results.

This “Leonardo” pattern, worked thus in double Italian cross-stitch, straight stitch and stroke stitch, will with care look the same on both sides; an important consideration in the ornamenting of curtains and other articles of which both sides are likely to be seen. To accomplish this three things must be observed: no knots can be used (a good needleworker almost never uses them), long lengths of silk are expedient, and neat finishing off of threads is compulsory.

The value of this sort of embroidery is not merely in furnishing an opportunity for new designs to the intelligent needlewoman; it is much more, for it awakens also an interest in the history and art of Italian Renaissance, a period full of inspiration and achieved beauty. It has seemed wise to publish with the design the painting from which it was taken, that the full charm of its original use might be realized. Also you will find on page 352 a reproduction of actual embroidery, which has been most carefully copied in detail from da Vinci’s painting and mounted in a practical fashion.