

The Art of Embroidery.

BY CANDACE WHEELER.

To the enthusiastic embroiderer of the present day, it is interesting to trace the history of the art back to its very beginning and discover, if possible, how and why the processes which are our heritage came to be a part of the knowledge of the world. A great deal of its early history is told in that intimate book of reference—the Bible—where we read that God gave “wisdom of heart” to certain men, “to practice all kinds of cunning work, of the engraver and the embroiderer in blue and purple and scarlet and fine linen.”

It is interesting to note, that here and elsewhere in the Bible we have mention by name of the colors in common use at that day, and that they were simply two—blue and scarlet—the purple being a union of the two.

We find also that those who practiced embroidery were chiefly—and in fact up to a certain period exclusively—men; and that they were exceptional men, what we should call men of genius. That they practiced all of the arts in turn or together, and that their skill was counted as direct inspiration.

The impulses of genius, as recorded in the Bible, are plainly referred to this heavenly teaching; and we find that in the robes of Aaron and his son—worn for ministry—even the design of the borders was according to divine command. This means, if we analyze the record, that at this particular point of time and place and history, the design of a border of embroidery was held to be a matter of such dignity and importance as to be worthy of direct inspiration. It gives us an idea of the importance of the art, and the place it occupied in the affairs of men, which without this little record we would hardly entertain.

It was then, according to biblical record, under direct inspiration, that this “cunning workman” to whom the Lord had given genius—a thing we can hardly spare to mechanical arts in these days—proceeded to the making of standards and ideals for all future ages. In his common practice of the arts he made each contribute to the other. He used gold and silver in needlework as if it were fiber, and by the same effort he added the fineness and flexibility of fiber to metal work.

In later history we find that embroidery was practiced by both men and women, and “raiment of needlework” counted as among the riches of the world. We even find its method described as “alike on both sides.” As we know in our modern practice that needlework “alike on both sides” can only be accomplished in one way, we see that these garments must have been done in that earliest and latest and most enduring form of elaboration with the needle, which we call “cross stitch.” Probably most of it