PHILIPPE DE LASALLE.

A "MISE EN CARTES" OF PHILIPPE DE LASALLE

APROPOS of the universal interest shown in the improvement of American standards of design, especially in the field of textile fabrics, a few notes on a *mise en cartes* by Philippe de Lasalle recently acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art may not be amiss.

This working pattern for the weaver, with four others of unnamed designers, was included in a collection of eighteenth century brocades purchased in Lyons last spring, and is now displayed with the others in the corridor of textiles, where a special exhibit of these weaves has been installed. While the Museum owns no fabric of Lasalle's design, the works of two lesser important men are shown, one a splendid strip of satin brocade by Salembier; another, a fragment by Jean Revel, who was the first to introduce naturalistic floral motifs.

The little town of Seyssel, lying at the foothills of the Juras where the mountains slope down into the lovely country of the Department of the Ain in Eastern France, was the picturesque setting chosen by Providence as the birthplace of this peer among French textile designers, Philippe de Lasalle, the span of whose life covered the most thrilling years of the eighteenth century.

Born in 1723, just prior to the accession of Louis XV, he not only lived to see the overthrow of the Bourbons with all the horrors that accompanied the downfall of that royal house, but, broken in spirit and ruined financially, he survived the tumultuous years of the Consulate and the Directoire and in the closing year of his life witnessed the birth of the Empire with Napoleon on the throne of France.

Of humble parentage, his life was that of any village lad until his aptitude for drawing placed him first under the tutelage of Sarabat, a prominent Lyonnais painter, and later with Bachelier and Boucher in Paris; masters who, with their contemporaries, had laid the foundations of the new school of ornament, the flamboyant rococo that was to replace the grandiose baroque style of the seventeenth century. In Italy the rococo was well developed, in fact had reached the height of its popularity there before it appeared in France, where Juste Aurèle Meissonnier (1693-1750), the Genoese, whose works afforded the French de-

MADAME DE POMPADOUR BY QUENTIN DE LATOUR.

signers a new field of inspiration, may be said to have been the pioneer of the movement.

Toward the end of the century and in the closing years of the reign of Louis XIV, while the delicate architectural traceries and the chinoiserie motifs familiar in the works of Berain still lingered, there appeared as well a curious type of ornament suggesting the cubistic forms of to-day. The Lyons fabrics remained formal and overweighted in their patterns until the period of the Regency, when there developed a gradual breaking away from a well-balanced symmetry, a marked deviation from the perpendicular, with the introduction of grotesque fruit and floral branches combined with bits of landscape, architecture and figures.

With the accession of Louis XV the country, so long shadowed by the declining years of a world-weary monarch, was ready to welcome a regime that would free it from the depressing atmosphere that had pervaded the royal household; and the brilliant court established by the young king stimulated every line of industry throughout the realm.

At Lyons the designers and weavers quickly responded to the new note, and the stylistic variations of the fabrics of this period reflect the gay atmosphere of Versailles. The ornate style of the preceding century held no attraction for the debonair courtiers and the French beauties that graced the charming pastorales of such men as Watteau, Boucher, Lancret and Pater; and in the flowered patterns of their costumes we find none of the stilted formality of the seventeenth century weaves.

While all through these years of transition various types of ornament were developing which here and there reflected an exotic influence readily traceable to the introduction of foreign goods brought into the country by visiting embassies from the Orient, or to the enlarged trade of the East India Company, naturalistic floral motifs increased in popularity both in the field of ceramics and fabrics and soon became the established vogue. To meet this demand weavers bent their energies toward perfecting the loom, while court designers, often working for both industries, turned to the Jardin des Plantes for inspiration; and the *mises en cartes* produced by these men prove the thorough technical training of eighteenth century craftsmen.

For many years Jean Revel, a clever draughtsman and weaver, who, as has been said, was one of the first to break away from the conventional and introduce natural motifs, had been working at Lyons to improve the mechanism of the loom; and it was he whose ingenuity evolved the "point

THE DANCE BY WATTEAU.

rentré" by which the weavers were enabled to reproduce the delicate half-tones that so enhanced the exquisite beauty of the woven floral patterns designed by the French masters. One of the most lovely silks of this type, possibly designed by Douet or Ringuet, two men of first rank among the designers of the day, is shown in Van Loo's portrait of the Queen, Marie Leczinska, painted in 1747, and another in La Tour's portrait of Madame de Pompadour, shown in the accompanying plate. Still another illustration, expressing all the charm and naiveté of the French coquette gowned in a rich brocade, is the delightful figure in "The Dance" by Watteau.

Thus it was that when the youth Philippe de Lasalle attained his majority in the third quarter of the century and his name was beginning to attract the attention of the connoisseurs, he was handicapped by none of the technical difficulties encountered by Revel and his fellow-workers in their early attempts to produce realistic floral effects in loom work; for a loom capable of meeting the requirements of the trade was ready to respond to the inspiration of the artist's brush, and the masterpieces of Lasalle found a waiting market at a time when the sumptuous taste of the court demanded an elegance and quality on which it never hesitated to spend lavish sums. It was in this atmosphere that Lasalle developed; and when the crash of the revolution swept all before it, it carried with it the life-blood of his genius. The height of his career was reached at a time when a blasé clientèle was becoming weary of the rococo, and the art of Lasalle struck a new note, a note that suggests a slight reversion to the balance and symmetry of the time of Louis XIV; and although his work reflects the same joyous beauty that marks the Louuis XV period, there is, as well, a dignity and restraint, a certain formality, so cleverly handled that no slightest suggestion of the enormous effort required in its production is felt.

Despite the fascination there is in the chinoiserie of Pillement and Gillot, the exquisite draughtsmanship of whose work is reminiscent of the charm of Bérain, the pastorales of the Huets that live in the *toiles de Jouy,* the beauty and grace of the garlands and trophies so popular in the Louis XVI period, the work of Lasalle is unique and places him far in advance of his contemporaries in the field of textile design.

No truer appreciation of his art has been expressed than that penned by one of his own countrymen, M. Cox, Director of the Musée Historique des Tissus of Lyons, whose tribute is given herewith.

"Technician of the first order, he had the infinitely rare quality of being able to execute his productions from the first stroke of the pencil to the last play of the shuttle. His greatest period was under Louis XVI. Lyons had the good fortune to count him among her workers, and it is to him that she owes the greatest glory of her fabrique. . . . His style is simple, large, forceful and of admirable drawing; with a touch direct and bold he places in juxtaposition high lights, half-tones and shadows without availing himself of the 'point rentré.' A few touches of black cleverly distributed are one of his characteristics. To him silk was sufficient and he used neither gold nor silver, nor did he make use of velvet, although he sometimes produced the effect of velvet by the introduction of chenille. In fact everything of his is of incomparable workmanship.

"But it is of Philippe de Lasalle the artist that we would speak. First, without question, he is essentially French; French by his absolute realism; a realism inherent in French taste. . . . He is equally French in the exquisite choice of his models. It was the flower garden, not the vegetable plot, that furnished his flowers. His animals are among the most graceful, the most rich in coloring, the most expressive of nobility; the downy warmth and sweetness of his dove, of his partridge; the opulence of his pheasant and of his peacock, the elegance of his swan, etc., which reflect the true French quality of all times, qualities that we fail to find in some of our neighbors who do not hesitate to delve in the mire for repugnant reptiles to serve as an inspiration for their ornament.

"Philippe de Lasalle is also absolutely of his time by the ensemble of his decorative motifs. Yet while resting in the tradition of that charming epoch that had given an attractive form to the most ordinary objects, his art had a much broader vision.

"Under Louis XVI there were two irreconcilable schools, the one representing the triumph of beauty and the grace of prettiness, the other, identified with the painter David, finding a more austere beauty in the formulas of the classical antique. To the former we owe the decoration of the Petit Trianon; to the second, the Pantheon. Philippe de Lasalle by essence is of the first school; but while the art of his confrères became more or less insipid and trifling, his is marked by an elegance, a sumptuous opulence, which only a genius such as his could conceive. Everyone 's familiar with the exquisite coquetry of the hangings, all in white, of the apartments of Marie Antoinette at Versailles. Let us compare them

SILK DESIGNED BY P. DE LASALLE.

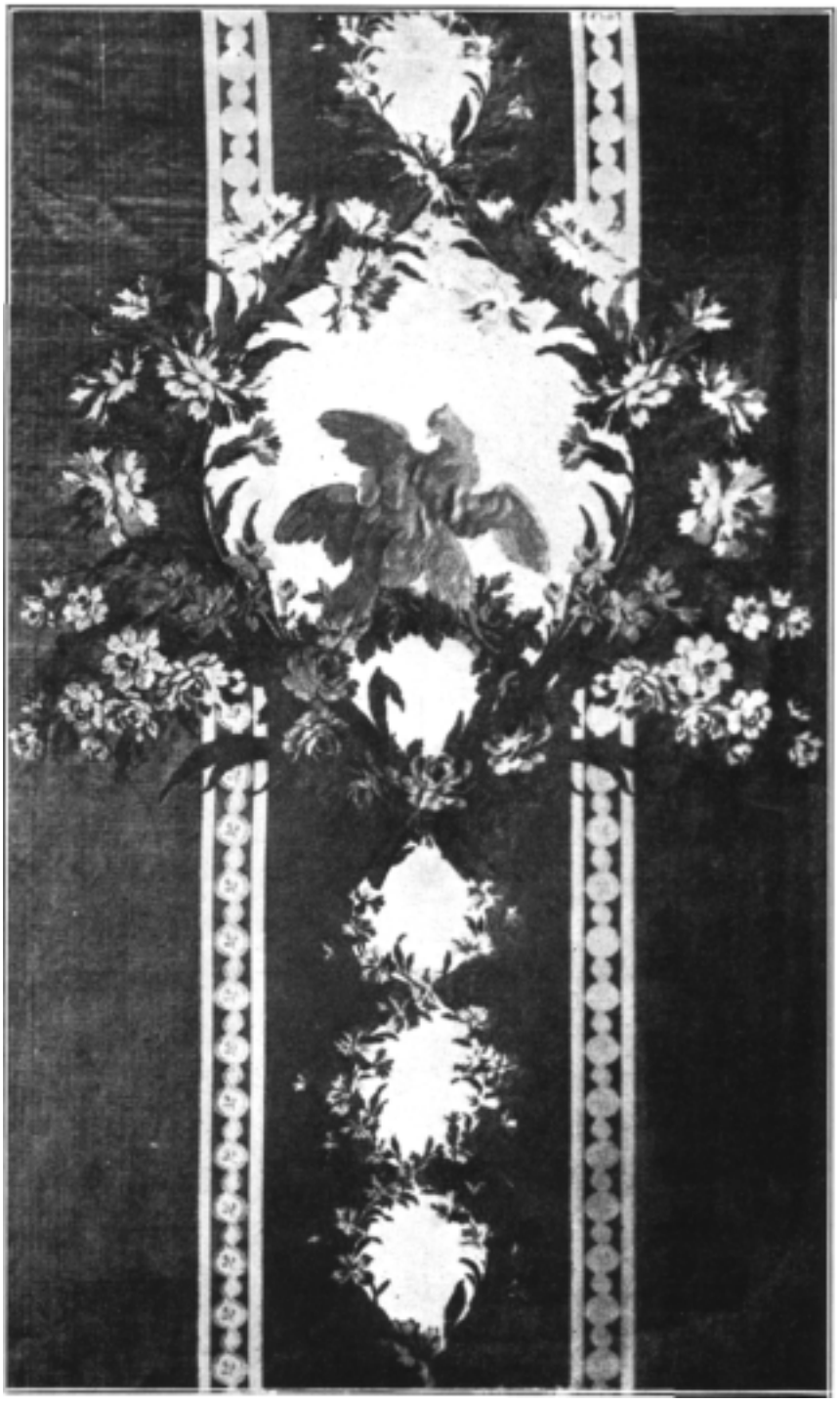
with those of the magnificent chambers of the same queen at Fontainebleu. Here Philippe de Lasalle loses none of the graces of his time, but he raises them to a dignity equal to that attained by the best fabriques of the Louis XIV period yet with none of the extravagance of that period. Who knows? If the Revolution had not broken out he might have been perhaps the point of departure in an evolution culminating in the renaissance of a decadent style.

"He was decorated by Louis XVI with the Order of St. Michel, a distinction carrying with it a pension of 6,000 livres. Demands for his work flowed in from at home and abroad.

"The Revolution was his complete ruin, not only materially but also artistically. The fashion of the day no longer demanded the sumptuousness which had been the glory of Philippe de Lasalle. His work was the personification of refined luxury, a fashion that was brought suddenly to a brutal end. His talent needed the inspiration of a cultivated and distinguished clientèle that did not stoop to bargaining. The parsimonious economy of the *nouveaux riches* was incompatible to his art. Too old to change his manner, he found no way to express himself. Nothing more cruel could have happened to his genius. Napoleon gave him not a single command. In the last years of his life he did hardly anything more than interest himself in developing the mechanism of the loom, painfully working in an atelier of the palace Saint Pierre, which had been conceded to him by the municipality of Lyons. It is there that he died.

"Now that time has consecrated the work of the artist, the name of Philippe de Lasalle brings to a brilliant close the history of the industry of Lyons under the ancient régime."

NOTE:—The "Mise en Cartes" which is the subject of this article proved to be too delicate in coloring to make a satisfactory reproduction.



SILK DESIGNED BY PHILIPPE DE LASALLE.