

SOME EMBROIDERIES FROM NEW MEXICO

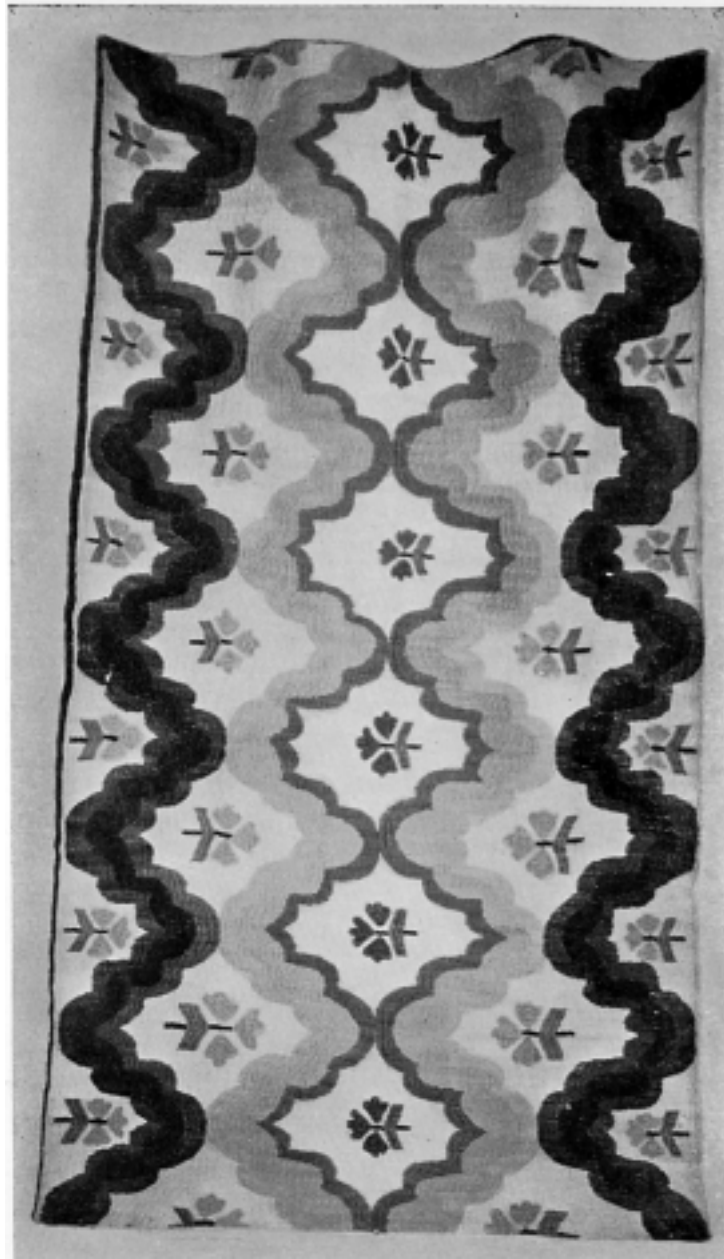
THE coverlets illustrated herein come from a section of northeastern New Mexico and southeastern Colorado, having been made about a hundred years ago by the descendants of the Spanish and Mexican settlers of the country. It is difficult for us who live in the East to realize how isolated, and therefore how foreign, large sections of the Southwest are even now, and up to the coming of the motor car and the building of better roads, sections of the Southwest were almost untouched by United States culture. Many of the people even now can only speak a few words of English and know nothing of the life of the rest of the country.

I have been unable to find out whence came the designs of these embroideries but suppose that they must have been derived from Mexico. They come from people who are farmers and cattle and sheep owners, who are poor in money but comfortable and content in their one-story adobe or wood houses; very religious, and enjoying very much their local Fiestas and their dances; with little desire for possessions or for change, or for speed. They are quick in their passions and live very close to the soil.

In the Rio Grande valley south of the section from which these bedspreads came, there were great *haciendas* with huge grants of land, and the people were very rich, each ranch having its own workmen making furniture, wood carving, etc., and it was probably under similar conditions that these bedspreads were made.

These that are illustrated are embroidered on homespun woolen cloth in solid wool embroidery covering the whole bedspread. They are locally called *Sabanillas*. Another type made in the Rio Grande region are worked on a linen or twilled cotton background and the pattern embroidered in an open design in fine crewel wool, mostly in buff, blue, black and a little pinkish red.¹ All the wool is native dyed with vegetable colors.

¹The edges of two of this type of bedspread which were exhibited at the Cosmopolitan Club this year can be seen in the photograph of the sampler illustrated. (Fig. 6).



N. M. FIG. 2

COVERLET IN DARK BLUE, SALMON PINK, YELLOW AND WHITE.

Figure One illustrated is about twelve feet long and as wide as a single bed, and in color is a fine indigo blue in two shades and some black and white. The stitch employed in all these bedspreads is a long stitch caught down in the center by a short stitch.

Figure Two is similar and is in dark blue, a pale salmon pink and pale greenish yellow and white. This type of diaper pattern is rather characteristic in various forms.

Figure Three has panels in Chinese red, with white panels between and sprays of leaves in delicate green. There are many bedspreads similar to this in type, with white ground and delicate sprays of flowers.

Figure Four is an unusual Spanish type, of very fine work designed in scrolls of white, red, green, with touches of yellow and black.

Figure Five was made to hang as a reredos of a church altar and represents the favorite saints of the region. Left to right on the upper line—Our Lady of Guadalupe, San Jose, Santa Lucia, San Antonio. Lower line, left to right—Santiago, Santo Nino (infant Christ), San Ildefonso, and San Miguel (St. Michael). Santiago (St. James) of course, was the patron saint of Spain and is seen trampling on the heads of the Moors. St. Ildefonso is a very popular saint in the Southwest, being a farmer saint. In the local legend he was met by an angel who told him to leave his plow and go to church. He replied that he must go on plowing. Whereupon the angel said he would send a caterpillar to destroy his crops. The saint still refused and was threatened with a devastating wind. Still he was obdurate, but when threatened with a bad neighbor with many children he capitulated and went to church.

The Spanish version is more moral, for in that the saint left his plow to go to church and when he returned found that the angel had plowed while he worshipped.

Figure Six, a large sampler about the size of a coverlet was bought at Taos, New Mexico, but it is not known whether it originated there. The material on which it is embroidered is a mixture of silk and wool, woven curiously in stripes of green, yellow and pale red on the front, but on the back it is solid gray. The embroidery is mostly in chain stitch with a linen thread, very roughly done, but curiously effective on its striped background. Here is the translation of the Spanish text and its date:

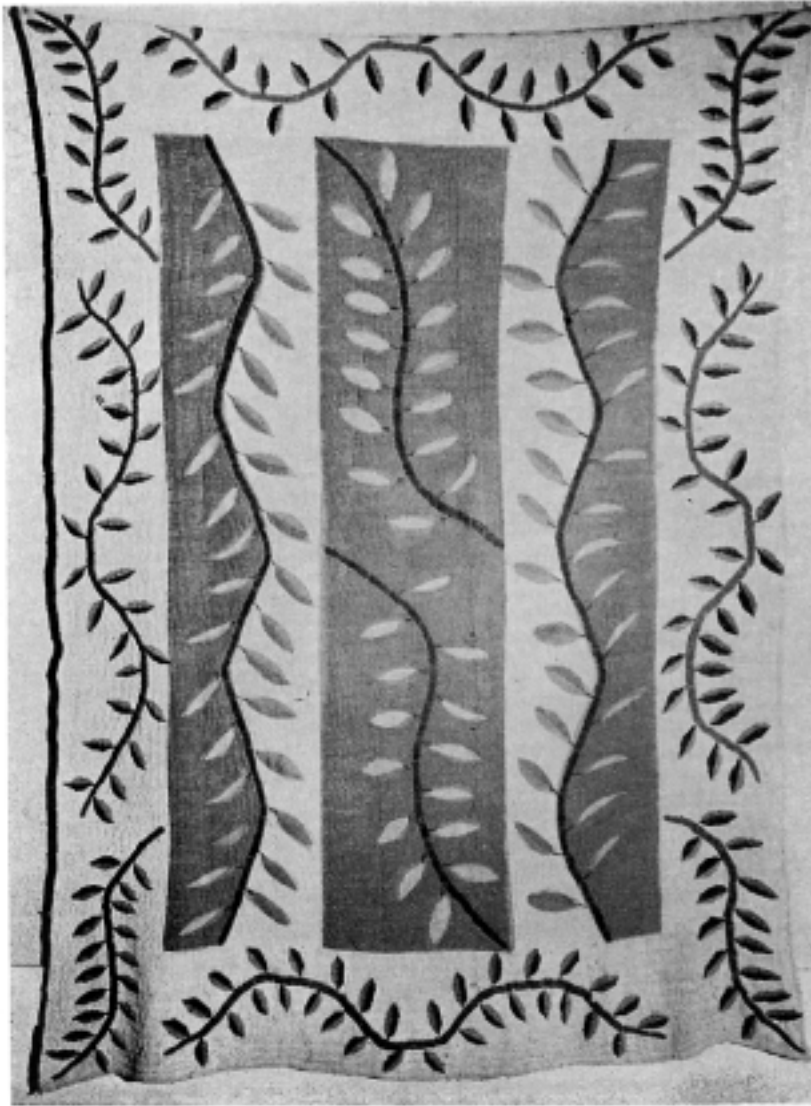


FIG. 3

COVERLET. WHITE FIELD WITH PANELS OF RED.



FIG. 4

COVERLET. UNUSUAL SPANISH TYPE WHITE GROUND PATTERN IN RED AND GREEN WITH TOUCHES OF YELLOW AND BLACK.

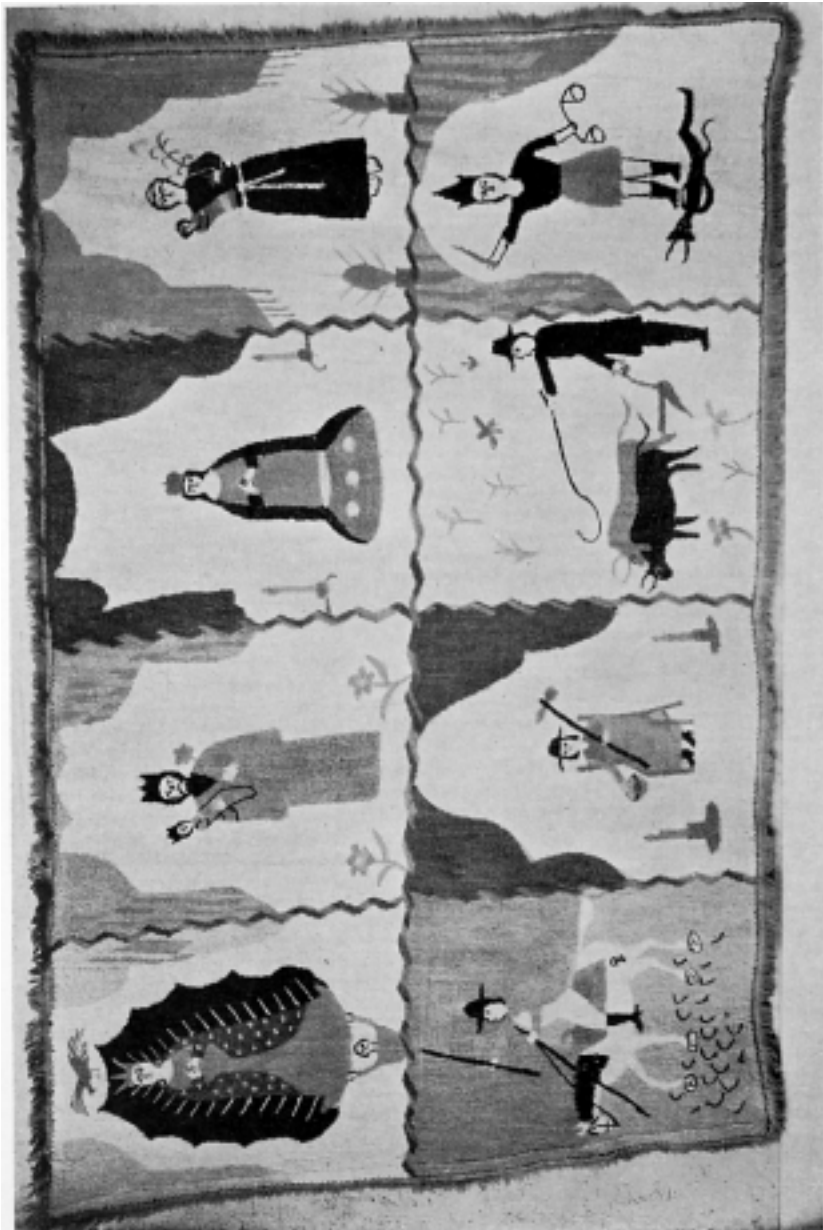


FIG. 5
EMBROIDERED REREDOS SHOWING FAVORITE SAINTS OF THE REGION.



FIG. 6

LARGE SAMPLER FROM TAOS. FOR INSCRIPTION SEE P. 26.

“In April of the year 1725 I began to place the white thread on this bedspread. It was done the 20th of July, 1725. This blue writing will give you the names of animals which have been designed on this bedspread. Looking at it closely you will find bison, bears, wolves, deer, lion, boar, a camel, pig, coyote, foxes and female foxes, cows, oxen, yearling cows, donkey, mule-like beasts, sheep and goats; also a plow and sieve and wheelbarrow and material which was used. Those animals which already are rare in these times and others which exist now in domestic use I have placed here for future remembrance. The mule and the ox and the sheep and the goat, the bison with its meat supply the nation. The donkey and the mule with loads on their backs exchanging commercial objects in far places and giving service to man. Formerly it was the buffalo. The horse and the donkey travelled long distances through mountains and they were badly managed and badly hurt with a heavy stick. Also the ox, pulling first with a stick tied to his horns. This was a yoke. Two sticks held the yoke together and people prodded them with a topil, which was a long stick with a sharp point. The man on the horse with his courage and a lance in his hand made use of the buffalo and made him work, and the goat with its wool and skin dressed his master, and with its meat and milk fed him. The animals that are labelled on the sampler are the deer, doe, bull, cow, donkey, pig, mule, coyote, yearling calf, sheep, goat, bear, wolf and camel lion.”

It is the most human and kindly text of any sampler that I know, curiously different from the pious and gloomy New England type. There seem to be two names on the sampler—Plicapio Valencia and Sipriaco Lerido—so it may have been made by a boy or two boys and not by the usual little girl of the New England tradition. Of course Valencia may be the place where it was made, for in New Mexico one does find Spanish importations, statuettes, embroideries and jewelry even now.

These *Sabanillas*, or wool bedspreads, and the other type of cotton bedspreads called *Colchas*, are owned in and near Santa Fe and have been bought mostly from the traveling collectors of antiques and not from shops.

MARY CABOT WHEELWRIGHT