

GARRICK ON COTTON

by

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AMONG the surprises of the 1955 exhibition at Manchester, "English chintz: two centuries of English taste", was the appearance of an example of a well-known *toile* that had always previously been called French. Its subject had not then been identified and the exhibition catalogue (no. 18) merely suggested that the "mixture of classical and Chinese elements seems English rather than French", though it noted that an example in the Musée de l'Impression at Mulhouse had always been called English. If the example in the Metropolitan Museum (Pl. 19) had been shown instead of the one from the Victoria and Albert Museum, the assembler of the exhibition and author of the catalogue, Peter Floud, could not have failed to note the blue warp threads in the selvages, required by the English Act of 1774. But, when the second, improved edition of the exhibition was shown at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1960, not only had the English origin of the design been established, but Mr. Floud and his assistant, Mrs. Barbara Morris, had identified the subject, so that the piece could be titled *Scenes from "Lethe,"* a short play by David Garrick, first produced at Drury Lane in 1740.²

As this play, though very successful, is now little known, it may be of some interest to describe it briefly and to identify the characters seen on the chintz. The action takes place in the underworld, on the banks of the Styx, where Charon and Aesop are discussing Proserpine's anniversary gift to mortals, a discriminating drink from the waters of Lethe that will enable them to forget merely what they wish to. The two fountains on the cotton, a very prosaic-looking pump under a Chinoiserie canopy and a jet springing from a classical ruin, presumably represent Lethe's waters, though they are not mentioned in the printed play. Mercury then escorts various characters onto the stage and each one tells Charon what he wants to forget.

At the bottom left-hand corner of the illustration, Aesop, distinguished by his hunch-back and wearing a ruff (perhaps to suggest that he is not a contemporary figure?) is seen in conversation with Lord Chalkstone, Garrick's own part. This figure is taken from an engraving by Gabriel Smith³; this shows Garrick flanked by standing figures, who are the Fine Gentleman and Aesop in the play, with Mercury behind them, and a river in the background. There are five quatrains below, the first and last reading:

“Well done old Boy! pshaw damn the Gout!
The Chalkstones never fail;
Thy Spirits, tho’ thy Limbs give out,
Are brisk as bottl’d Ale.

Chalkstone! thy Rank thou truly knows’t,
The Nobleman I see!
And, Heav’n be prais’d! our Isle can boast
Of many a Lord like Thee.”

Lord Chalkstone, though a martyr to gout and rheumatism, does not say he wants to forget them. He tells Aesop, “‘I came merely for a little conversation with you, and to see your Elysian Fields here’ (looking about through his glass) ‘which, by the bye, Mr. Aesop, are laid out most detestably. No taste, no fancy in the whole world! Your river there—what d’ye call—’ Aesop: ‘Styx.’ Lord Chalkstone: ‘Ay, Styx—why, ’tis as straight as Fleet-Ditch. You should have given it a serpentine sweep, and sloped the banks of it. The place, indeed, has very fine capabilities; but you should clear the wood to the left, and clump the trees upon the right. In short, the whole wants variety, extent, contrast, and inequality!’ (Going towards the orchestra, stops suddenly and looks into the pit.) ‘Upon my word, here’s a very fine hah-hah! and a most curious collection of evergreens and flowering shrubs!’”

This, presumably, is the moment shown in the engraving and the chintz, as Lord Chalkstone is raising a glass to his eye and stares straight ahead of him. We can be sure that Garrick, as great in comic as in tragic parts, paused here for his laugh. The character of Lord Chalkstone was added when the play was rewritten in 1749 and the passage just quoted makes fun of a figure recently come to prominence, Launcelot (Capability) Brown (1715-1783), the landscape gardener. The phrase that won him his nickname is included, and the words “serpentine” (still preserved as the name of the ornamental water in Kensington Gardens), “clumps”, “ha-ha,” and “slopes” are frequently found in contemporary writing about gardens. An admiring poet (William Whitehead) makes Brown address the following lines to Nature:

“Who thinn’d, and who group’d, and who scatter’d the trees?
Who bade the slopes fall with such elegant ease?”

The feminine lead in *Lethe* was played by Kitty Clive (1711-1785),

who is shown in the centre of the chintz, with Mercury politely ushering her in; the be-turbaned negro page, holding her fan, is not mentioned in the cast of characters. The figure is again taken from a print, this one by A. Moseley, dated 1750.⁴ It is inscribed: "Shew me to the Pump Room then, Fellow. Where's the Company? I die in Solitude, etc.," and priced at sixpence. The pugdog under her right arm is more conspicuous in the engraving. She is Mrs. Riot, or the Fine Lady, one of Mrs. Clive's best parts; a contemporary says of it that "such sketches in her hand showed high finished pictures." Kitty Clive was one of the finest comediennes of the century. Horace Walpole wrote the inscription for her tomb, concluding with the lines, "The comic muse with her expired And shed a tear when she retired," but perhaps the rarest compliment was paid her by Dr. Johnson, who said to Boswell, "Clive, Sir, is a good thing to sit by; she always understands what you say." She played frequently with Garrick and said of him, "Damn him, he could act a gridiron."

The unhappy figure on the right is probably the Old Man, who tells Aesop that he wishes to drink from Lethe because "I would fain forget, if you please—that I am to die." He says, however, that he is rich and Aesop suggests that he drinks to forget this. The idea is not well received, but the Old Man agrees to drink a little to "forget how I got my money", and adds that his servant, who accompanies him, is to drink "to forget that I have any money at all." The figure above him is the Fine Gentleman, played by Henry Woodward; it bears some resemblance to this character in the Gabriel Smith engraving, though not taken entirely from it. It might otherwise represent the French Marquis, who wanted to forget that, in his own country, he was only a barber.

The play concludes with the decision by all the characters that they will think things over before drinking. Its popularity is attested by the prints mentioned and others that are not related to the chintz, by Bow figurines (c. 1750) of the actors in these parts,⁵ and by the *toile* under discussion. This cannot be as early as the figurines, since it is a copperplate engraving, a technique first used (in Ireland) in 1752. Possibly a command performance of the play in 1766 was the occasion it commemorates. But the example in the Metropolitan Museum must date, as noticed above, from 1774 or later. As usual, most examples of the chintz have been found in America; did the colonists recognize the actors and their parts? Why were they pleased to hang their beds with this rather antiquated theatrical scene? The choice of subjects for "copperplate furnitures" is an interesting field of enquiry.

NOTES

1. *Pennsylvania Museum Bulletin*. Vol. XX, no. 95, 1925 (May), pp. 160.161. illus. cover (set of bed-hangings, blue, called Jouy); *Antiques*, Vol. 26, no. 6, 1934 (Dec.), p. 230 illus. (with two extra figures of old men, called Jouy); Victoria and Albert Museum, *Brief guide to the western painted, dyed and printed textiles*, 1938, p. 29, pl. VII (blue, called Jouy); *Metropolitan Museum Bulletin*, N.S. Vol. X, 1951 (Dec.), p. 133, illus. (called French). There is also an example in the Du Pont Museum, Winterthur.
2. Victoria and Albert Museum, *Catalogue of a loan exhibition of English chintz*, 1960, no. 161; *English printed textiles*, 1960, pl. 11.
3. British Museum, *Catalogue of engraved British portraits*, Vol. 11, p. 284, no. 149. MMA Print Room example, 17.3.3306.
4. *Ibid.*, Vol. L, p. 451, no. 6 MMA Print Room example, 17.3.756-1220.
5. "Henry Woodward as the Fine Gentleman," Bow figurine. Example in the Untermyer Collection, New York (Yvonne Hackenbroch, *Catalogue*, pl. 77).

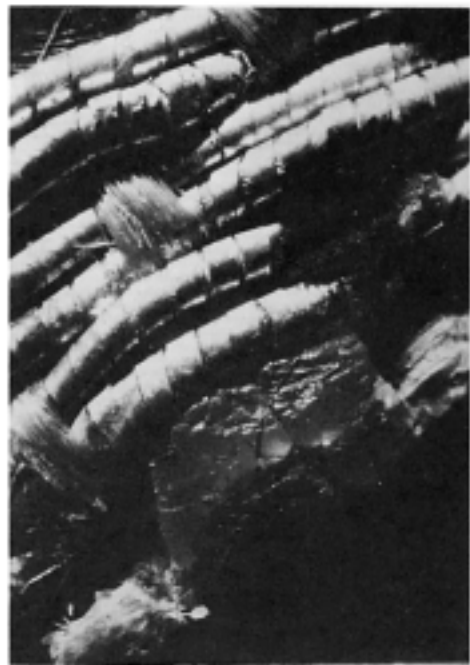
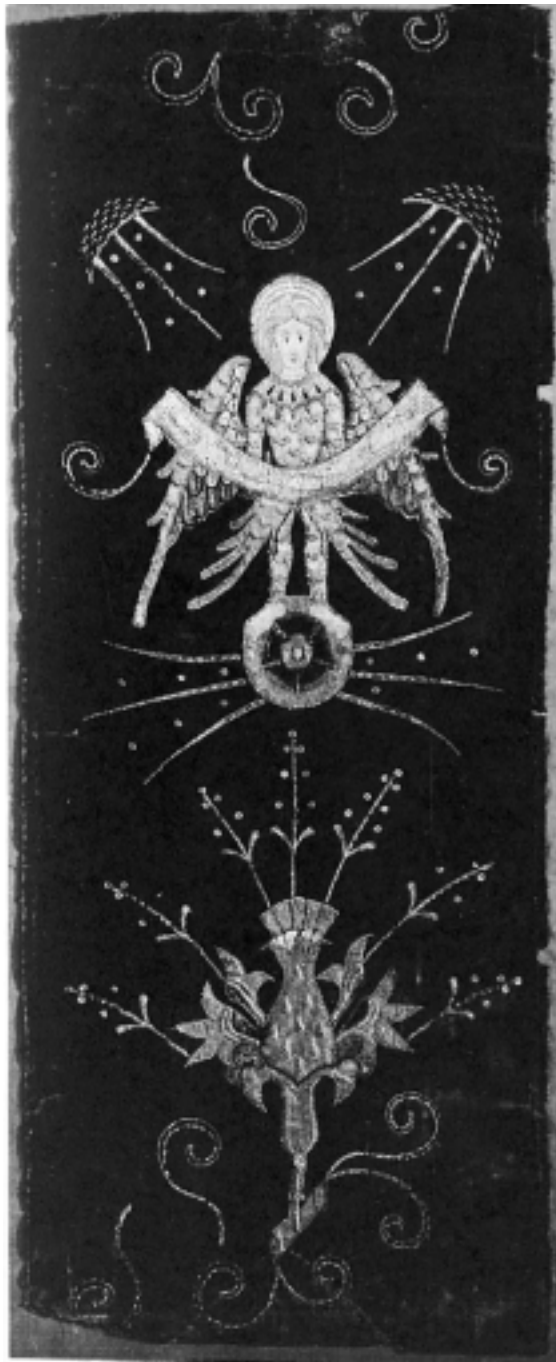


PLATE 1 — Fragment of a Panel, Appliqué Embroidery on velvet, part of a vestment or altar hanging. English, circa 1500. (M.F.A. 51.1726).

PLATE 1a — Detail: magnified 21 X, showing wax on edge of cut linen.

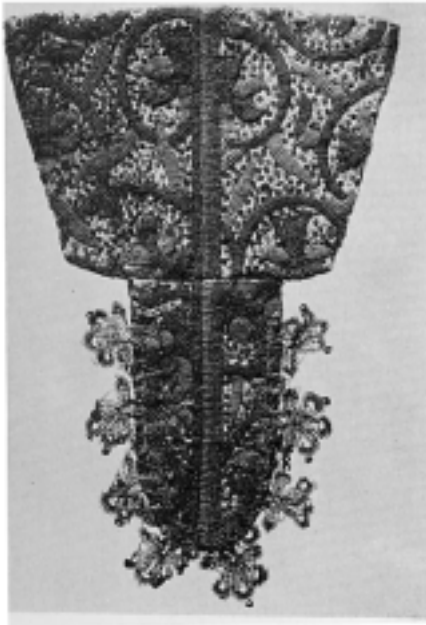


PLATE 2— A Woman's Embroidered Doublet. English, circa 1578. (The Elizabeth Day McCormick Collection, M.F.A. 43.243a).

PLATE 2a — A Stomacher to match Doublet. English, circa 1578. (The Elizabeth Day McCormick Collection, M.F.A. 43.243b).

PLATE 2b — A Woman's Embroidered Coif and Forehead Cloth. English, circa 1578. (The Elizabeth Day McCormick Collection, M.F.A. 43.244 a & b).

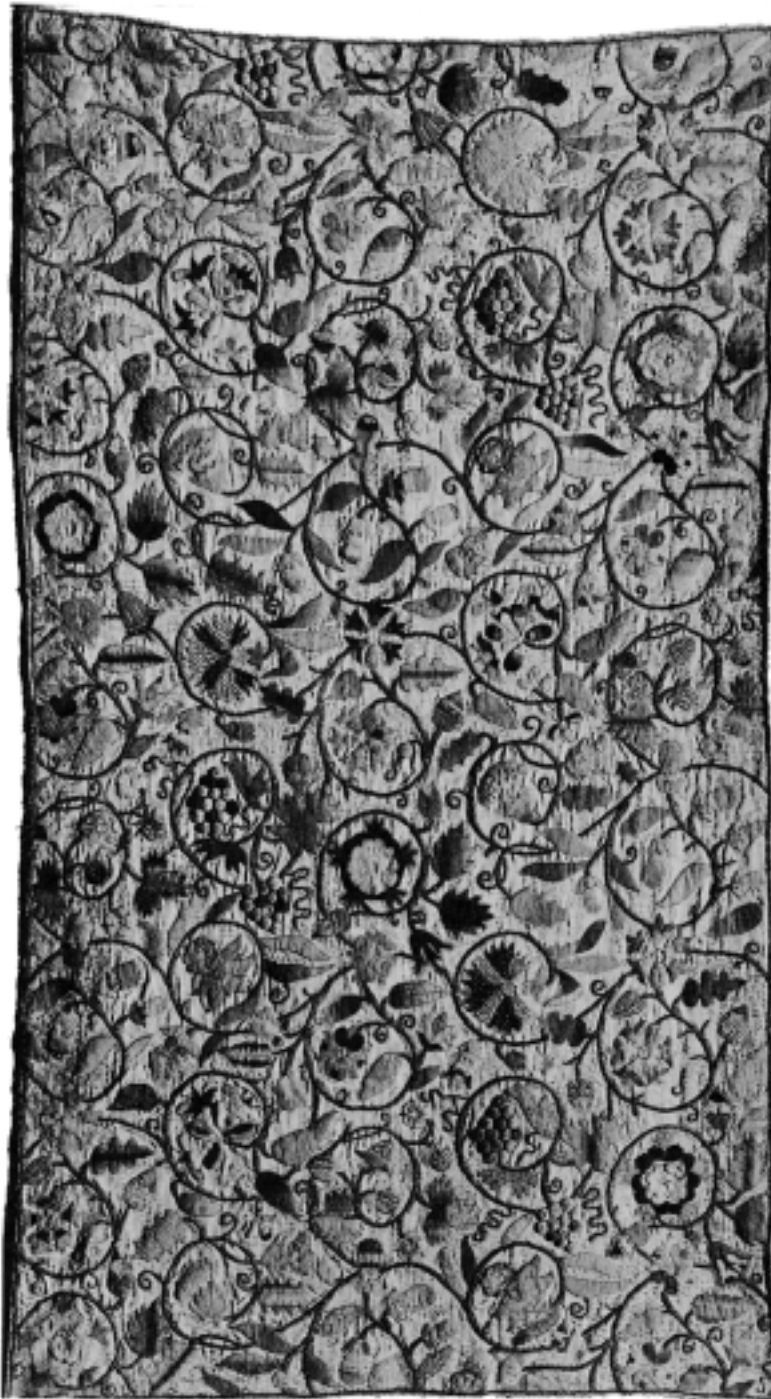


PLATE 3 — Embroidered Pillow Cover. English, late 16th or early 17th century. (The Elizabeth Day McCormick Collection, M.F.A. 43.254).

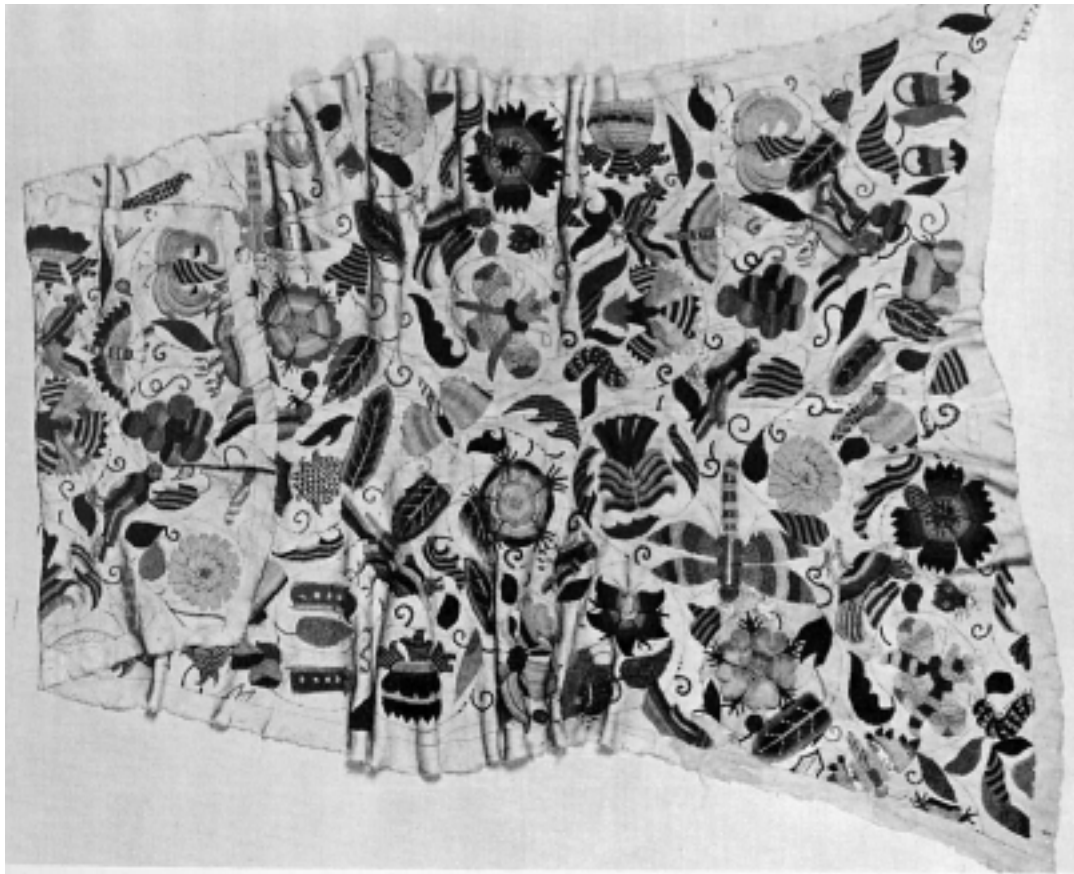


PLATE 4 — Embroidered Sleeve, unfinished. English, late 16th or early 17th century.
(M.F.A. 38.766).

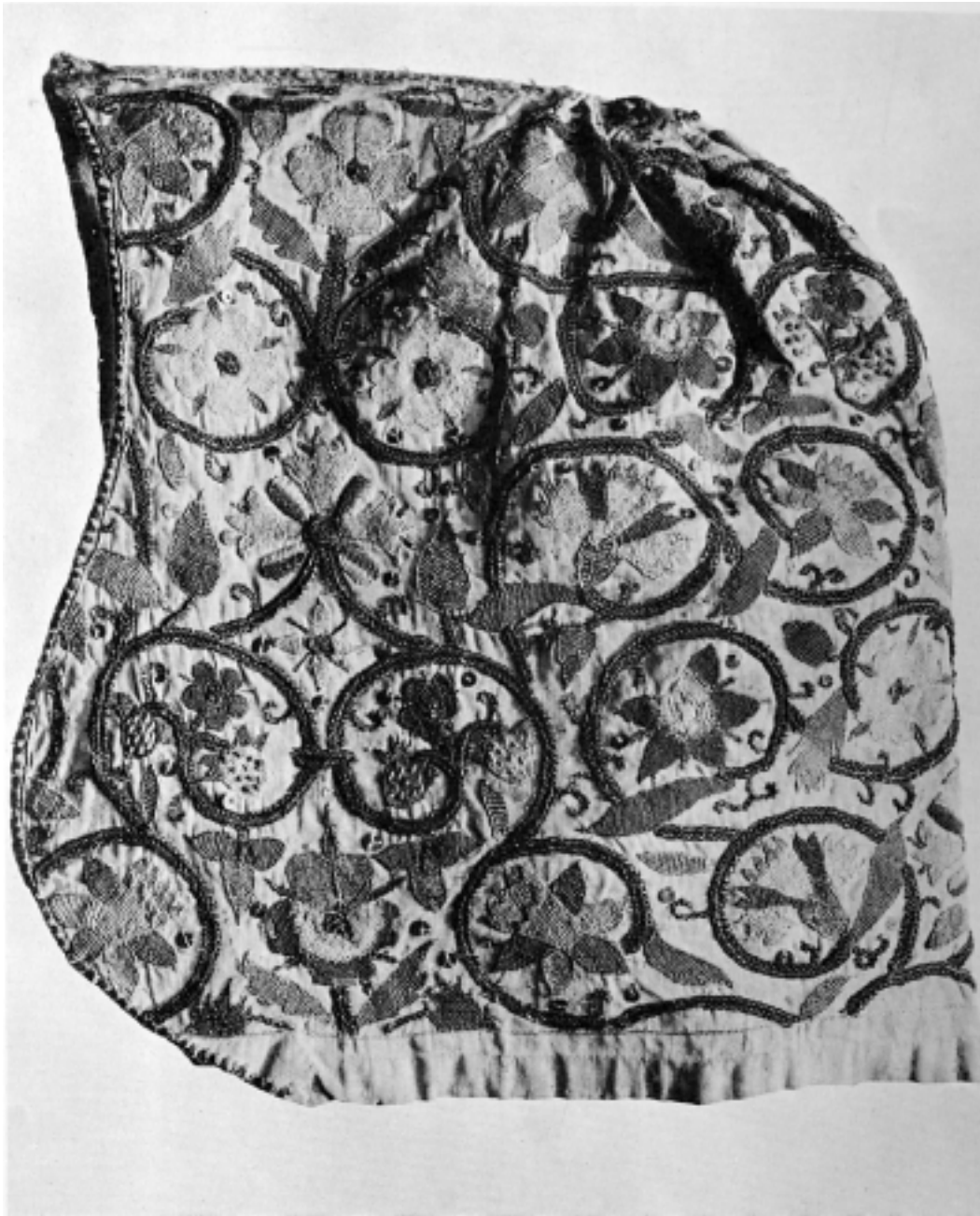


PLATE 6—A Woman's Embroidered Coif. English, late 16th or early 17th century.
(The Elizabeth Day McCormick Collection, M.F.A. 43.249).

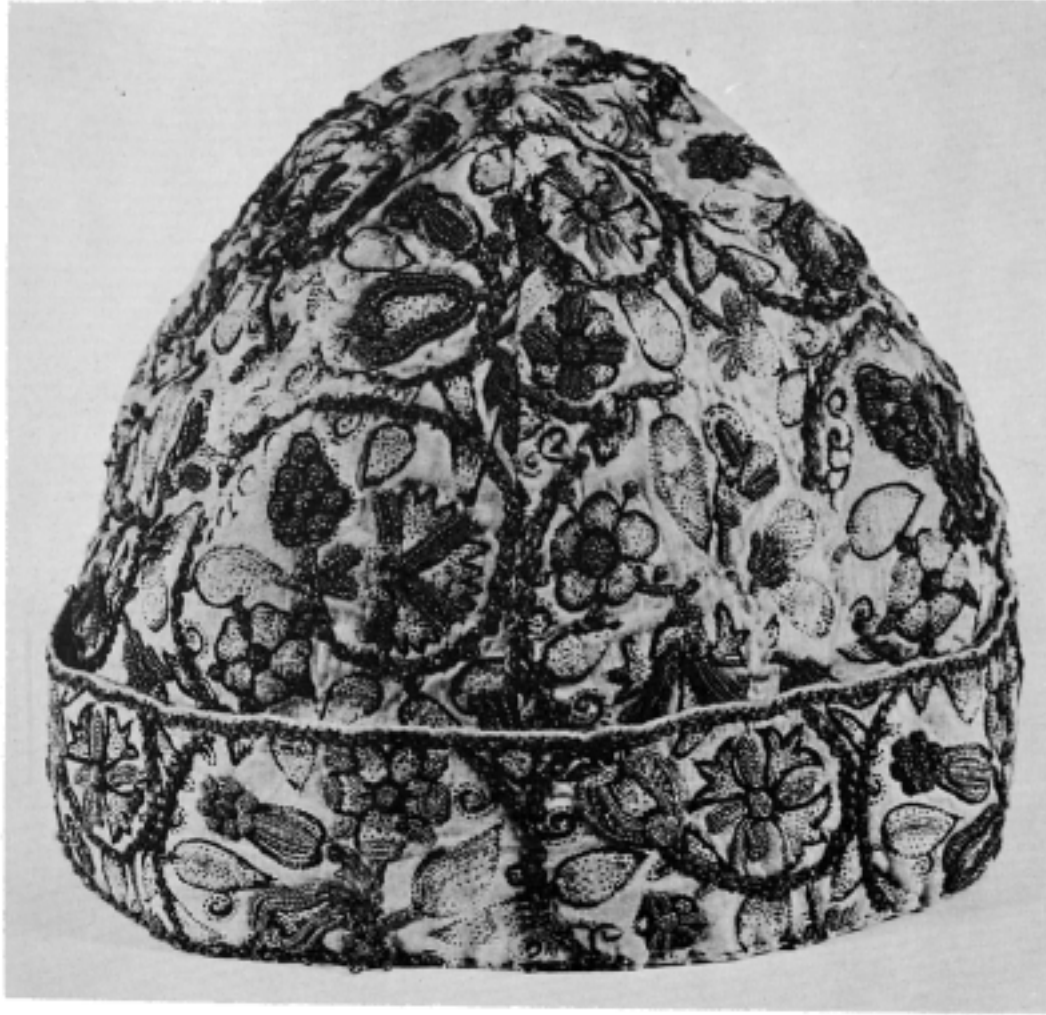


PLATE 7—A Man's Embroidered Cap. English, late 16th or early 17th century. (The Elizabeth Day McCormick Collection, M.F.A. 43.251).



PLATE 8 — Portrait of Richard Tomlins, attributed to Marcus Gheerhaerts, the younger, dated 1628. Courtesy of the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

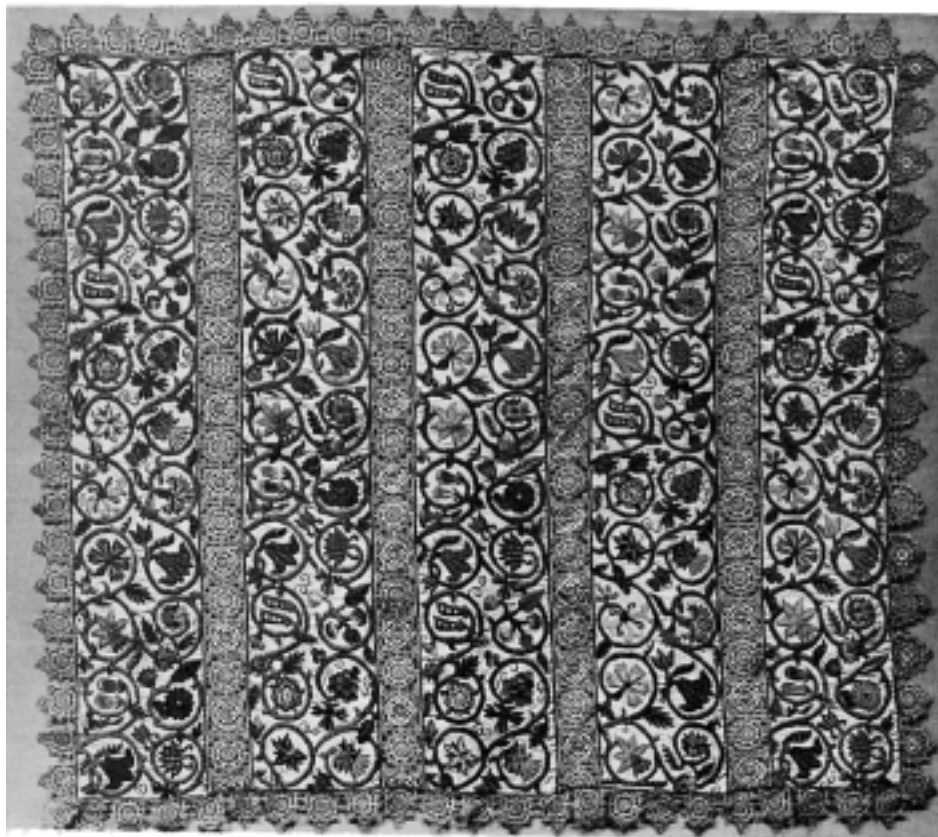


PLATE 9 — Embroidered Cover. English, probably late 16th century. (M.F.A. 38.1082)

PLATE 9a — Detail.



PLATE 10 — Embroidered Cushion Cover. English, first half of 17th century. (The Elizabeth Day McCormick Collection, M.F.A. 47.228).

PLATE 10a — Detail.

PLATE 10b — Detail, magnified 14 X.



PLATE 11 — Embroidery Sampler. English, probably first half of 17th century. (M.F.A. 33.667).

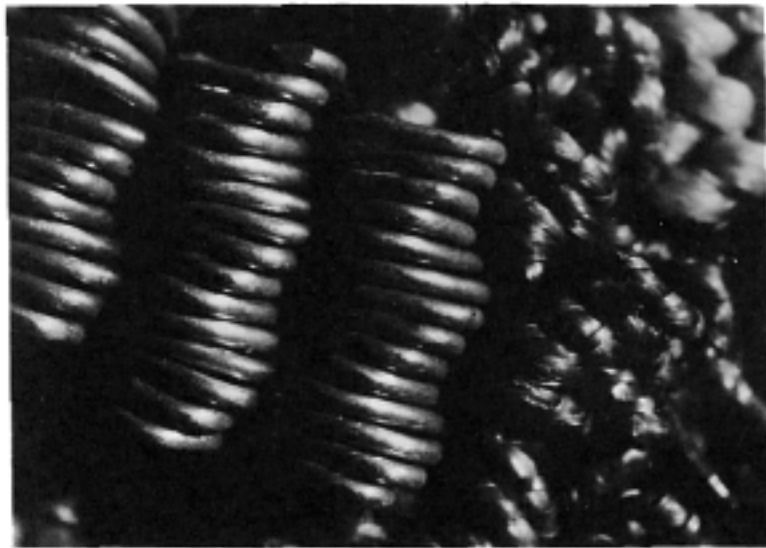


PLATE 12—Embroidered Picture or Cushion Cover. English, 17th century. (The Elizabeth Day McCormick Collection, M.F.A. 43.420).

PLATE 12a—Detail: magnified 14 X.

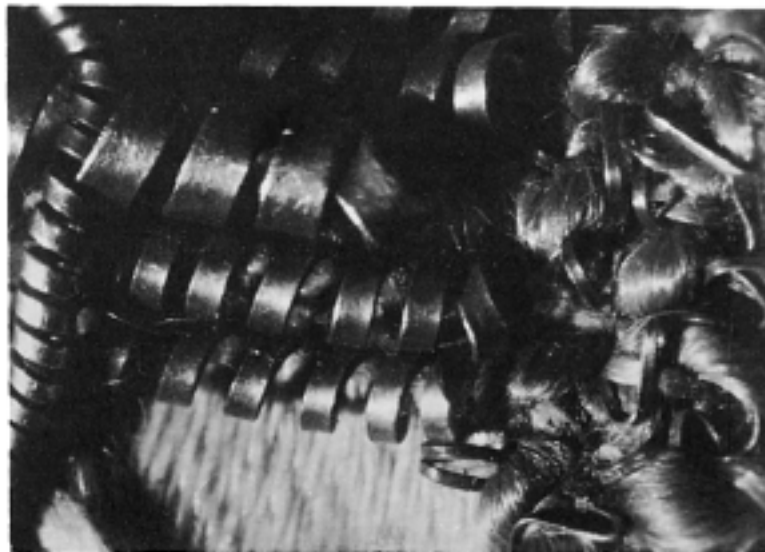
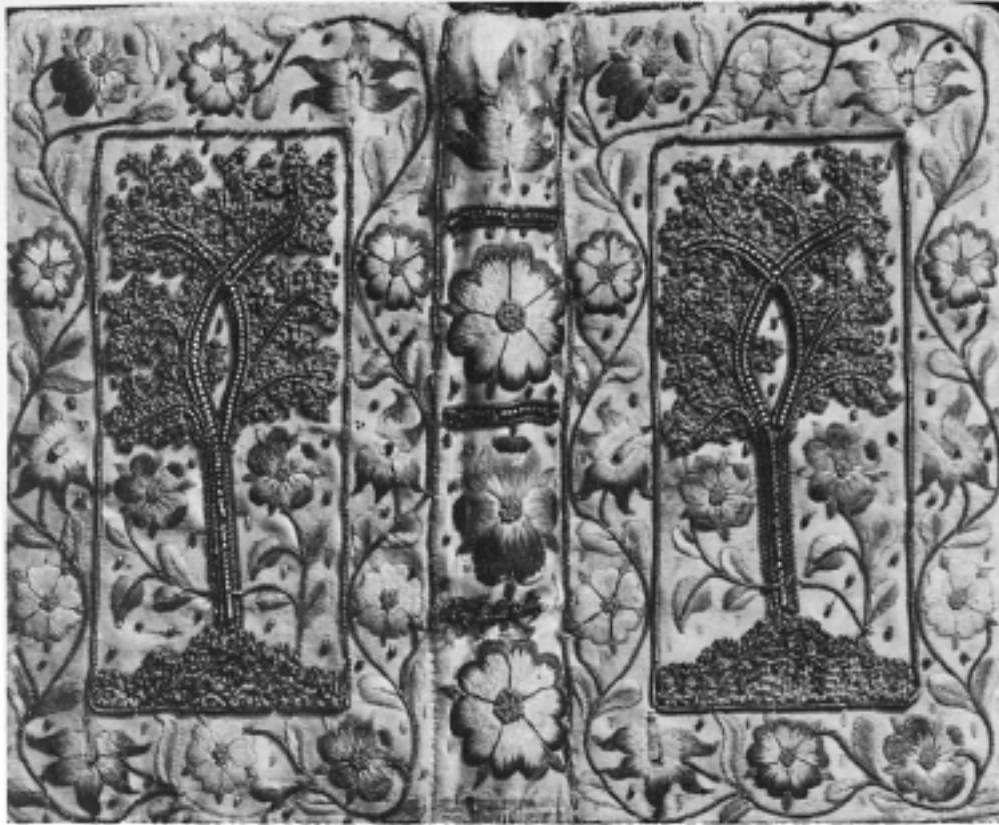


PLATE 13 — Embroidered Case, probably for Needles. English, 17th century. (M.F.A. 34.213).

PLATE 13a — Detail: magnified 14 X.

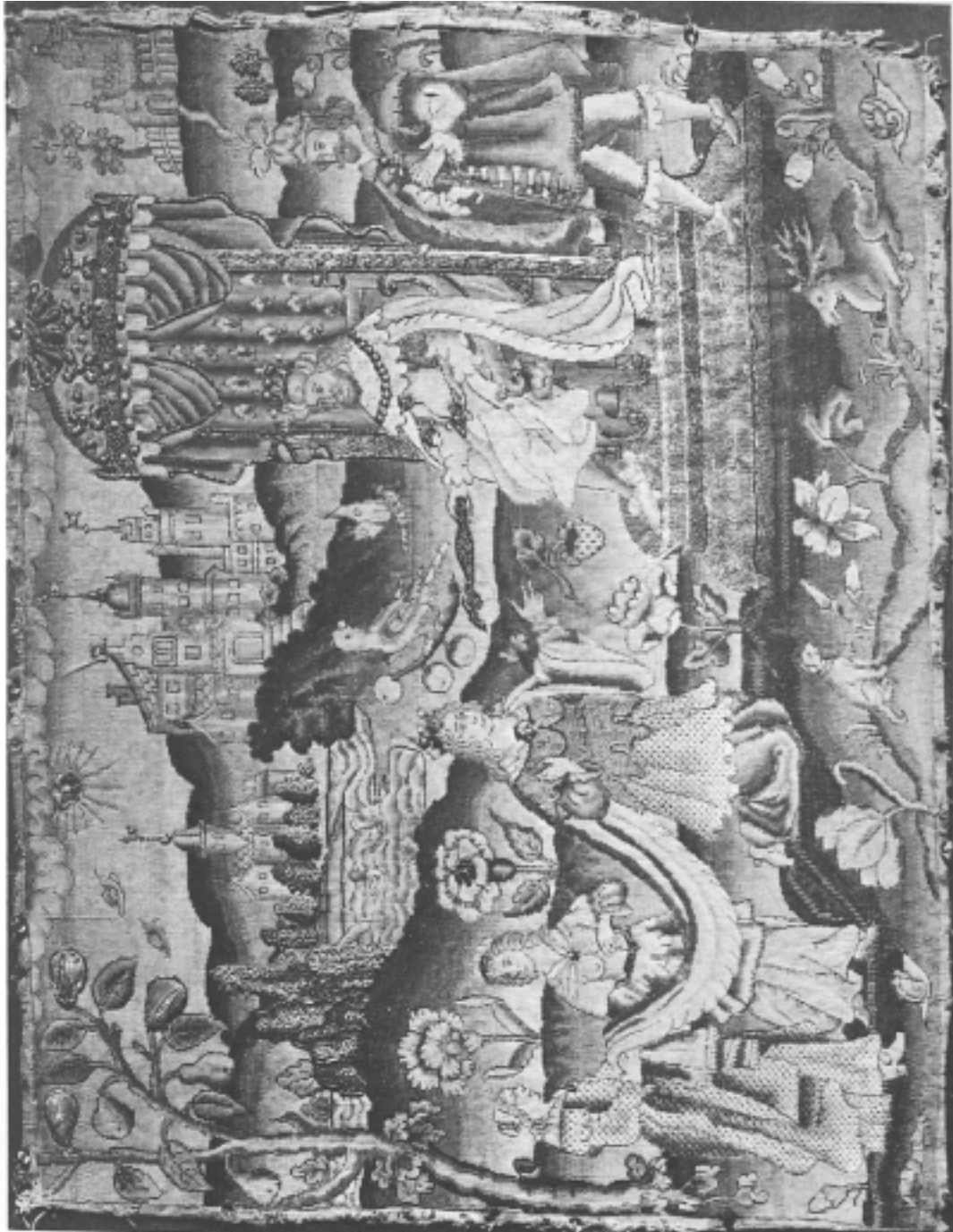


PLATE 14—Embroidered Picture, Queen Esther and King Ahasuerus. English, 17th century. (The Elizabeth Day McCormick Collection, M.F.A. 43.319).

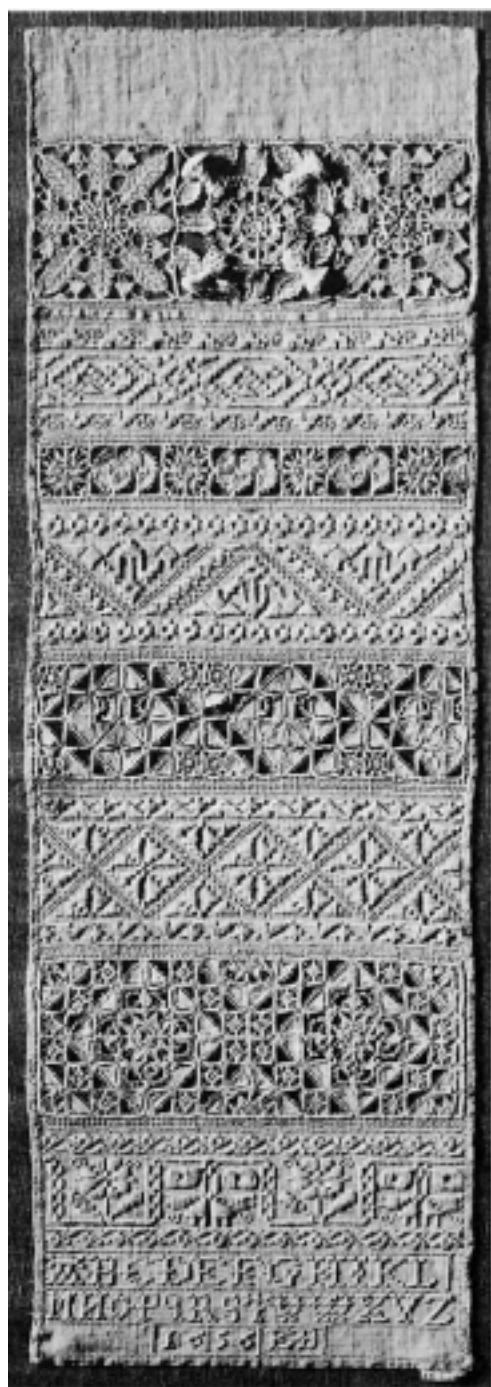


PLATE 15 — Lace and Embroidery Sampler. English, dated 1656. (M.F.A. 35.2000).

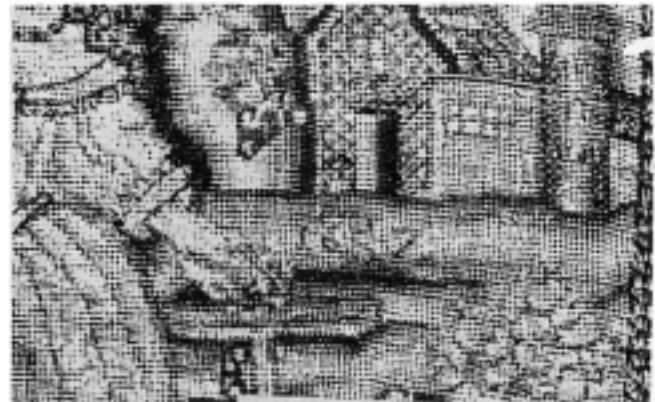


PLATE 16 — Needlepoint Cabinet. English, dated 1657. (The Elizabeth Day McCormick Collection,, M.F.A.. 43.524).

PLATE 16a — End of Cabinet.

PLATE 16b — Detail, showing date.



PLATE 17 — Embroidered Cabinet, detail of end panel, Isaac meets Rebekah. English, 17th century. (M.F.A. 59.1033).

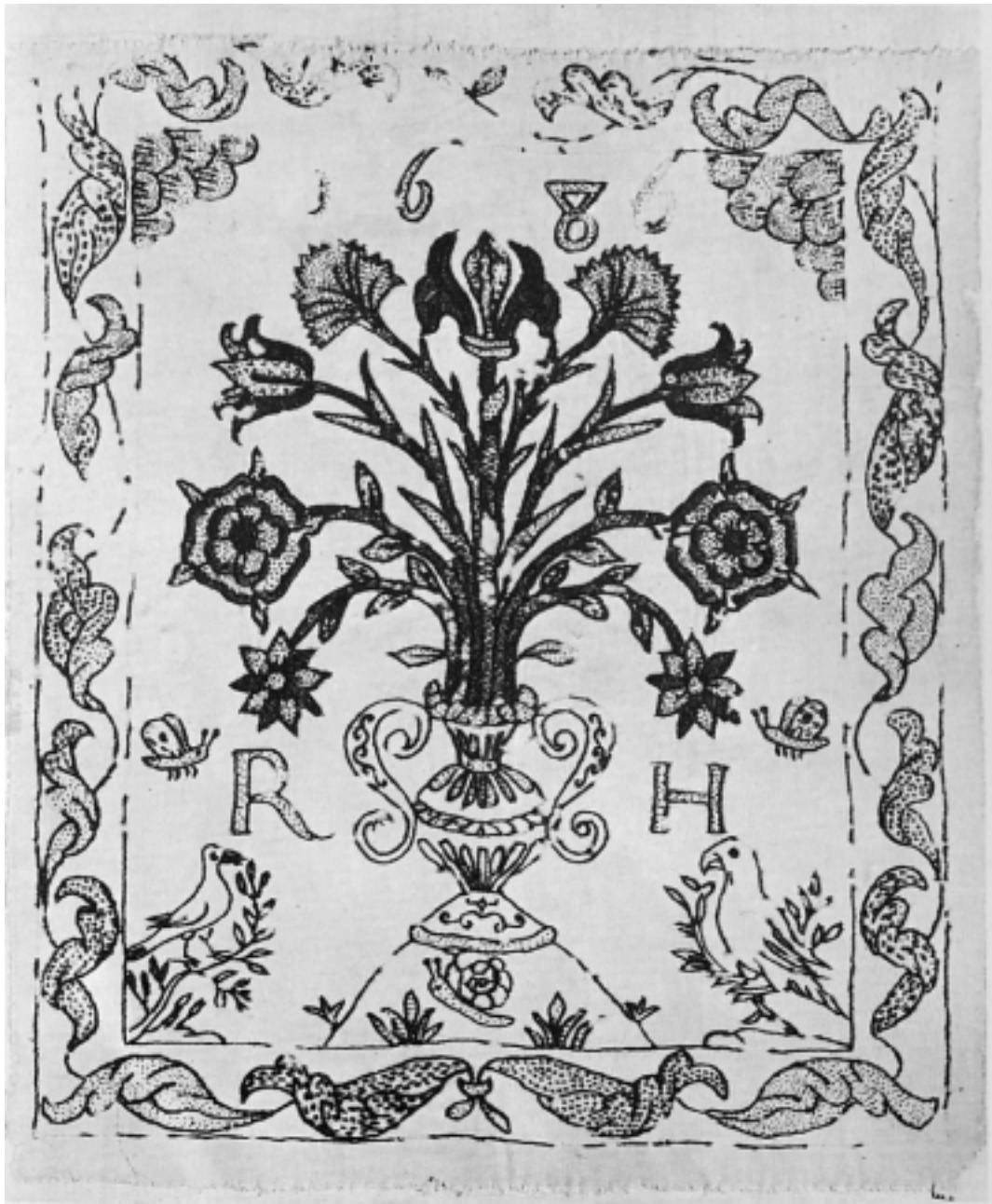


PLATE 18 — Panel, Crewel Work on Fustian. English, dated 1686. (M.F.A. 34.2).



PLATE 19 — Printed cotton, scenes from *Lethe*. English, c. 1775. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 50.59. Gift of Mrs. Lydia Bond Powel, 1950.