

III.

NOTES ON A CHALICE VEIL IN THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ANTIQUITIES. BY Miss LAURA E. START, M. ED., UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER.

The piece of sixteenth-century embroidery (fig. 1) lately acquired by the Museum from Miss Drummond is an example of an almost¹ unique

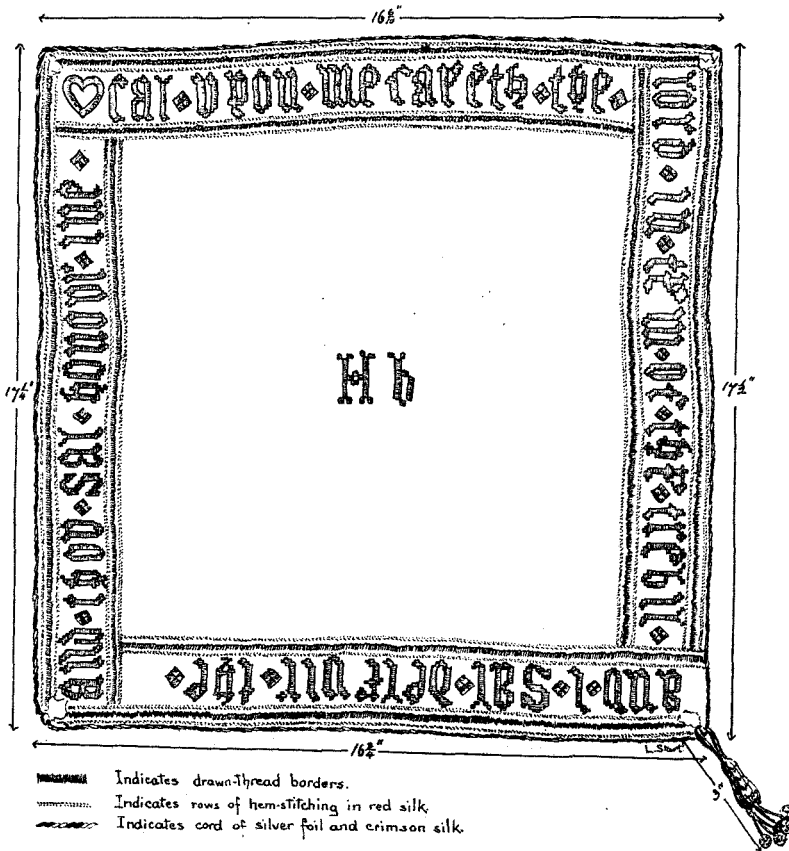


Fig. 1. Chalice Veil in the Scottish National Museum of Antiquities.

kind, its decoration consisting solely of an embroidered text used as a border and enclosed between lines of fine stitching and drawn-thread work.

¹ See footnote at end.

The linen of which it is composed is handwoven and of a fine, even texture having an almost equal number of warp and weft threads to the inch, the average being 108 warp, 104 weft. The rectangle is not quite a square, its sides measuring $16\frac{6}{10}$ inches, $17\frac{1}{2}$ inches, $16\frac{3}{4}$ inches, and $17\frac{1}{4}$ inches respectively, and the edges have been neatened by a narrow hem $\frac{3}{32}$ inch wide, to which is sewn a two-ply cord also $\frac{3}{32}$ inch in diameter. This cord now appears to be composed of strands of red and fawn-coloured silk, but was originally much more gay, for the fawn silk has

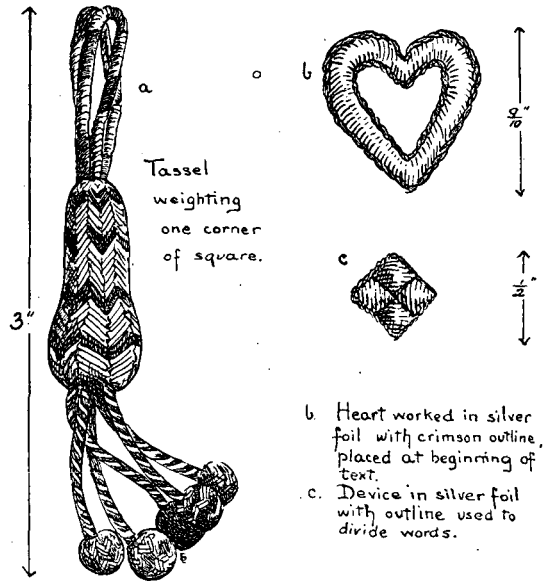


FIG. 2. Some details of the chalice veil.

once been wrapped with silver or silver-gilt foil, the same material being used for the rather elaborately plaited tassel which still decorates one corner of the cloth (fig. 2a). From the torn condition of the other corners it seems likely that at one time each was weighted by a tassel, and this possibility, combined with the number of rows of stitching and grouping of the drawn-thread border and the use of a text as the decorative motive, make it almost certain that the linen was intended for use as a chalice veil.

The beginning of the quotation is marked by a heart (fig. 2b) worked in silver foil outlined with crimson silk and runs, "cal upon me cayeth the lord in tym of the trebil and i sal delyvir the and thou sal honour me." The letters, worked in crimson floss silk, average 1 inch in height, and are executed in satin stitch. It will be noted that the work has been carried

out as though the linen were a fine canvas weave, oblique lines obtained by a step-like arrangement of right angles taking the place of curves in the letters. Separating each word, except the third and fourth, is a small device (fig. 2c) worked in silver thread with a crimson outline which may be purely decorative or may represent a St Andrew's cross, in which case it may denote Scottish origin.

The lettering has a triple border on either side (fig. 3), consisting of a central stripe of drawn-thread work, $\frac{5}{32}$ inch wide, with two narrower stripes flanking it, each made up of three rows of red silk hem-stitching, the stitches being worked into each other so as to produce a series of small holes like modern punched work.

In the drawn-thread border each group of threads is worked over by

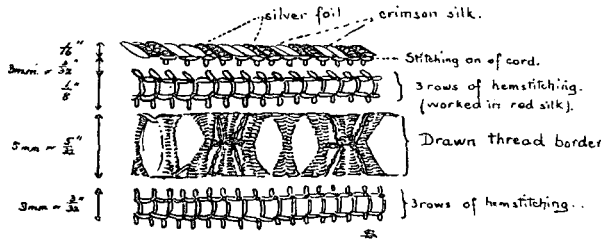


FIG. 3. Detail of stitched and drawn-thread borders which enclose the lettering on the chalice veil.

a stitch carried backwards and forwards as in weaving, and the groups are then drawn together in threes alternating with a single group (fig. 3). This arrangement of the drawn-thread border, the three rows of hemstitching, and the three rows comprising the outer and inner borders of the lettering, were probably intended to represent the Trinity, the Three in One, although the embroidery was being worked at the time when John Knox was preaching Calvinistic doctrines and symbolic representations were not in favour.

In the centre of the linen, embroidered with silver foil, are the initials H. B. (Helen Bruce), which is probably the signature of the worker; although the fact that the workmanship is not so good as in the lettering of the border and that the foil is wrapped round a core of a lighter colour than that used for the devices in the border and the cord, might indicate a later date for the addition of these two letters.

Whether the veil is of Scottish origin is not quite certain from the style and workmanship: the H. B. and the possibility of the devices separating the words being St Andrew's crosses are points in favour of this view; but, on the other hand, the only similar example the writer has been able to trace is an English one in possession of the Victoria and

Albert Museum (fig. 4), of which a descriptive footnote¹ is given; but whatever the country of origin, this veil is a beautiful and unusual specimen of altar linen of the sixteenth century.

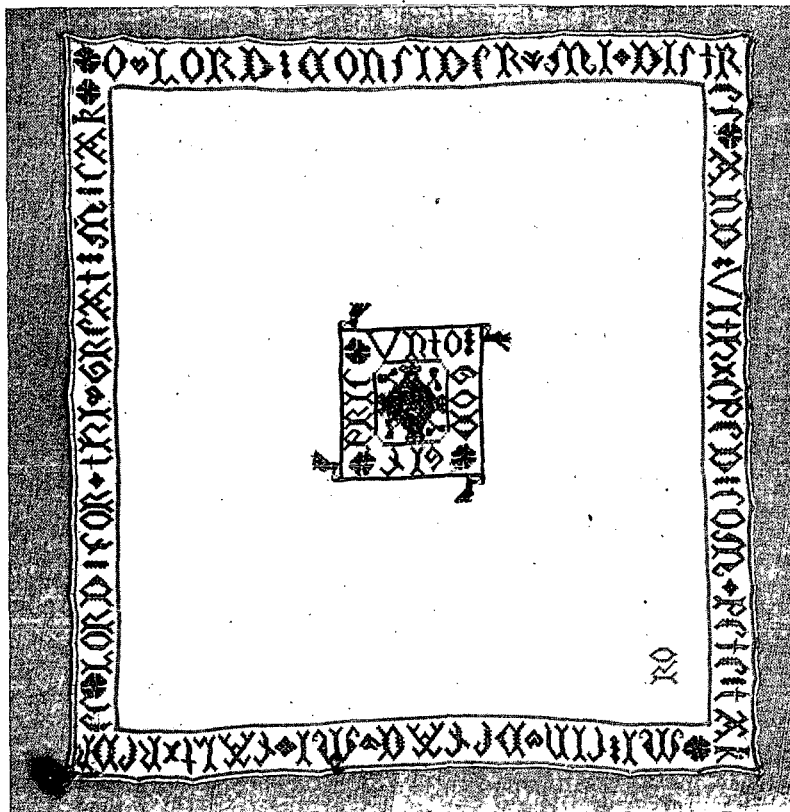


Fig. 4. Chalice Veil in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Reproduced by kind permission of the Director.

¹ T 331. Victoria and Albert Museum: "*Chalice Cover*.—This cover of linen embroidered in silver thread and pink silk has a diamond-shaped ornament in the centre surrounded by a border with 'Vnto God gif pris.' Small conventional birds fill the corners, and the outer border contains the verse, 'O Lord consider mi distres, and vith sped som pete tak, mi sin defac mi falt redres, Lord for thi great m(eroy) sak:' (probably a metrical version of the beginning of Psalm li.). In one corner of the cover are the initials R. O., and the words and lines are separated by small devices. The date is late sixteenth century."