

**LITTLE ILLUSTRATED BOOKS
ON FRENCH FURNITURE II:
FRENCH FURNITURE UNDER
LOUIS XIV**

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Little illustrated books on French furniture II: French furniture under Louis XIV by Roger de Felice

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ROGER DE FELICE

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LOUIS XIV**

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FRENCH FURNITURE II

FRENCH FURNITURE
UNDER LOUIS XIV

BY ROGER DE FÉLICE

TRANSLATED BY
F. M. ATKINSON



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INTRODUCTION: SOME SETS OF FURNITURE UNDER LOUIS XIV

THE Louis XIV style is one that chance has endowed with a splendid name, *Louis Quatorze*. . . . Those sonorous, sumptuous syllables, as rich as the gold of the Gallery of Mirrors at Versailles, are they not in themselves completely expressive? If the Louis XV style was to express a whole society of voluptuous refinement, the Louis XIV style is verily the style of the King. It was to satisfy his taste, to express his mind, to titillate his pride and to proclaim his glory that Le Brun and Le Pautre devised their pompous decorations, that Perrault and Mansard marshalled their columns and raised their cupolas, that Le Nostre planted his alleys on lines meted out by stretched cords, that the Kellers founded bronze, that Domenico Cucci and Claude Ballin chased precious metals, that André-Charles Boulle cunningly wedded brass and tortoise shell with ebony in the Louvre, and at the Gobelins the lapidaries matched the stones of Florence, the cabinet-makers put together their ingenious cabinets, the silver-smiths made tables and pots for orange trees out of solid silver, the tapestry workers wove their enormous hangings stitch by stitch, while at

Tourlaville the glass workers made mirrors larger and clearer than those of Venice.

Whole volumes might be written on the Louis XV and Louis XVI styles without even a mention of the princes whose names they bear, but this would be quite impossible with the style we are about to discuss in this little book. Although he had not, whatever that sharp-tongued Saint Simon may say, "a mind rather below the average," Louis the Great was quite ordinary in intelligence and was furthermore extremely ignorant, two defects that he redeemed in the exercise of his vocation as king by dint of good will, application, and hard work; he was not, as we would say, much of an artist—and he clearly proved this on the day when, in order to remedy the distressed state of his finances, he decided with equal absurdity and magnanimity to melt down all his prodigious store of plate, whose bullion value was nothing in comparison with its artistic value, while he kept his diamonds—but he insisted on deciding everything, and always made some alteration in the designs submitted to him. He had of course his own personal taste, which Colbert consulted and which Le Brun, who shared it, contrived to impose upon the artists of every kind who worked under his absolute domination. What was specially dear to this *super-man*, who, as Mlle. de Scudéry says, "when playing billiards retained the demeanour befitting the master of the world," was majesty and grandeur allied

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with sumptuousness; and also symmetry and regularity; qualities which, as we shall see, are the fundamental characteristics of the style to which he has given his name.

The best artists and craftsmen, then, worked to the orders of the King, who continually needed new furniture for his royal mansions of the Louvre, Saint-Germain, Fontainebleau, Marly; they worked for the princes of the blood, for the Ministers of State. This engrossed all, or nearly all, their output; they were taken away from their guilds and brigaded at the Gobelins or the Louvre, where they were subjected to a rigid discipline. The great nobles, the wealthy financiers, the high magistrates, imitated the Court according to their means, but were obliged to fall back upon second rank purveyors and on less precious materials. Their furniture is none the less in the same style as that made for the King, all blazing with magnificence.

If we come down one degree lower, and try to make acquaintance with the homes of the well-to-do bourgeoisie or gentlemen with good broad lands, as they are disclosed in the inventories made after their owners' death and in the reports on the affixing of seals on property, which inventories have been preserved in great numbers and in some cases published, and are the most authentic sources of information on this subject, do we always find furniture of the Louis XIV style? We come too often on tables or arm-