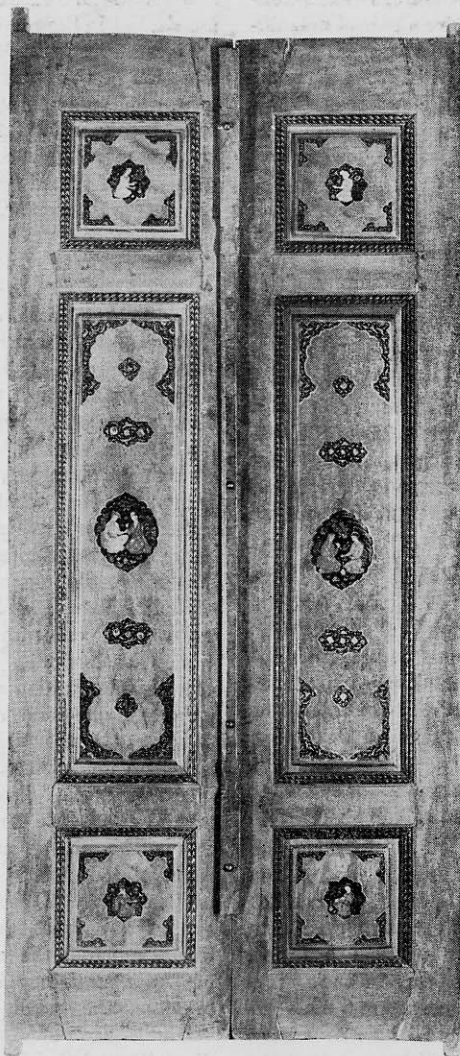


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PALACE DOORS FROM THE THRONE
ROOM OF SHAH ABBAS
Persia, 1587-1629

PALACE DOORS FROM THE THRONE ROOM OF SHAH ABBAS

Doors from a Persian Palace are at any time uncommon in private or museum collections. Miniatures, ceramics, bronzes and rugs are among the Eastern arts with which we are most familiar. The Detroit Institute of Arts, therefore, is exceptionally fortunate to acquire a pair of magnificent doors said to have come from the famous "Hall of Forty Pillars," the throne room of Shah Abbas the Great (1587-1629), in his pavilion Chahi Situn, in Ispahan, then the capital of the Empire.*

The Royal Palace of which this pavilion was a part was one of the most splendid examples of architecture of the Safavid Dynasty, to be considered with the well-known "Royal Mosque," the Majid-I-Shah. It was in the Safavid Dynasty that mediaeval architecture reached its golden period, and most of the examples—such as the Royal Mosque with the great arch, flanked by twin minarets behind which lies the great dome, the college with its brilliant tiling, and lastly the palace in the gardens with its famous pavilion and throne room—date from this period.

One reached the "Hall of the Forty Pillars," which stood in the gardens, through the "Ala-Kapi," called the Lofty Gate. Twenty columns carved from the plane tree (a wood much used in Persia) supported the roof of the throne room from which we assume our doors to have come. Smaller rooms opened off to either side for use by the ministers and for service to the Shah. Our doors probably come from one of these rooms.

The doors, which are paneled and constructed of apple tree wood, ornamented in a remarkable manner with gold dust and miniatures painted upon a brown lacquered surface, express in their magnificent design and decoration the aesthetic spirit of the court of Shah Abbas. Closely examined, it will be seen that the background consists of very refined and

delicate brush work, an all-over pattern of golden loops giving both softness of quality and brilliant surface gleam, changed or intensified as the light happens to strike the gold. The looping strokes run generally in a horizontal direction across the central panels, but in the small square panels they are almost vertical. By thus changing the direction of the stroke to catch the light from a different angle, the beauty of the effect is enhanced. Further charm is given by the medallions containing miniature paintings of seated figures. They are attributed to the master, Sultan Mohammed, a conspicuous court painter of the Safavid Dynasty, but seem to be in the style of an artist like Aga Riza.† Moreover, the period of Aga Riza's work conforms more closely to that of our doors, since his work dates upward of 1600.

The miniatures of the long panels, the finest of the series, represents a prince, or Shah Abbas himself, as it may very well be, seated in company with a princess in a garden.†† It is an idyllic scene of leisure and refinement, where there is feasting, gardens, love and song. Green palms and flowers prettily suggest the royal gardens of Shah Abbas. A golden vase, a cup and saucer and pomegranates are at his feet, while the emperor, reclining against a green silken cushion and holding a pomegranate in one hand, reaches out the other to accept the wine which his princess offers him in a golden cup. She is arrayed in brown garments brocaded in gold, and under her arm is a tambourine. Her head is covered with a golden turban, while wisps of hair fall in graceful curls down her shoulders. The scene is at once the symbol of a court life which accepted its leisure much as the oft-quoted quatrains of Omar describes it, where the flask of wine, the bread, the book and the "thou" make out of a wilderness a paradise. The whole is delicately framed by a moresque arch outlined in gold at the top

*The companion doors are in the collection of the University Museum, Philadelphia.

†Examples of his work are found in the collection of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and the private collections of M. Vever and Barron Edmund Rothschild, Paris.

††Those who do not affirm this to be the portrait of Shah Abbas probably place their opinion upon the argument that he is never represented with a smooth face.



and bottom of the panel. The spandril of the arch is painted in black and delicately decorated with the floral sprays in gold, the leaves and flowers arranged in alternate rhythm.

In the corresponding medallions the composition is the same in type, but, true to Persian inventiveness, totally different in minor details. The figures, for instance, are put in alternate position respecting the first medallion. The color of the costumes and the gestures are changed, the tambourine is omitted, the headdress is varied in both figures, while the prince leans forward to take the arm of the princess in his hand, delicately suggesting the amorous scenes to which there are so many allusions in Persian poetry. In both instances the medallions and miniatures, with all their fineness of drawing, are subordinated to the decorative use which was the first concern and interest of the Persian craftsman.

The delicacy of brush work in the drawing of the face, especially the eyes, the nose, the mouth and the drawing of the curls, in both the figures of the prince and princess, should be noticed, since they are

particularly noteworthy, together with the remarkable brush work in the all-over golden looped pattern. One should note, also, that in both central medallions the essential curves of the two kneeling figures are so drawn as to subtly follow the scalloped line bounding the medallion. The Persian in his best periods was always a master in adapting the line of his figure or floral motifs to the conventional and geometric areas of his self-imposed limits.

The medallions are of three types—heart, star and cartouche shaped.

The miniaturist, it is clear, has adapted conventions which he employed in title pages and upon book covers—that of the cartouche and heart-shaped medallions; the background of these medallions are usually blue and the vine motifs painted in gold. Blue would not be a durable color upon the doors exposed to use and wear, and in all probability the black was substituted to give permanence as well as richness. A very similar medallion composition, with two figures seated in a garden of the same type, is seen in a very fine Persian title page of a later date in the collection Vever, in Paris, illustrated in



Ernest Kuhnel's *Miniaturmalerei im Islamischen Orient*. We also find the same shapes closely corresponding to the three types of medallions used in two well-known animal rugs of the 16th century: the woolen animal rug in the collection of Prince Swartzenberg, Vienna, and the rug in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum.*

It will be seen, also, that where the surface is given a black background, a heavier coat of lacquer has been used, presenting a slightly raised surface in these parts, and in the instances of the moresque arches in the long panels creating a slight perspective and an illusion of depth.

Close observation shows that a very definite and subtle scheme has been employed both regarding the color and figure composition, producing an excellent occult balance.

The dominant colors of the upper panel are red and gold against black, while the

figure motif is a courtier. In the lower alternate panel the dominant color is simply green against black, while the figure motif is a woman. The same principle of assymetry is consistently followed in the other panels and in the two central medallions, both in color and figure composition.

Finally, in looking at these doors, one should bear in mind not so much their correspondence to other arts in Persia, but the surface and patterns of the doors themselves, their magnificent refinement of design and the execution of it, the beauty of detail and of the composition as a whole: in fine, the aesthetic attitude of the Persian which led him to decorate the surface of his furniture with such extraordinary brush work as the golden loops and the medallions with miniatures, never becoming ornate but always keeping a due regard for the proper use of color and of spaces.

A. C. E.

ITALIAN RENAISSANCE FURNITURE

The purchase of a pair of carved Italian cassoni of the XVI century adds a new type of this important article of Renaissance furniture to the Institute's collections.

To realize the prominent role which the cassone played in the furnishing of an Italian home of the XIV, XV and XVI centuries, it is interesting to view for a moment an Italian interior of this period. Owing to several causes, chief of which was perhaps the fact that the Italian spent so much of his time in the garden and out of doors, the interiors of the XIV and early XV centuries were sparsely furnished, sometimes to the point of what would seem to our modern eye actual bareness. The principal apartment, the living room, with its rough plaster and stone walls, often covered with painted frescoes imitating hangings, and its beamed ceilings with painted decorations, formed a colorful background for the few pieces of furniture, which were as a rule placed around the walls of the room. These usually consisted

of benches, chests, a few plain stools with seats of braided straw placed near the hearth, and sometimes a long table, though this was more often set up when needed, being made of two trestles holding a heavy plank. In addition there were sometimes a few cupboards without doors built into the thick walls. The hearth and chimney piece, the enormous hood often gaily decorated with painting or sculpture, formed the principal feature of the room.

Since the number of pieces of furniture were so few it was often necessary for them to serve many purposes, and in this respect no article was so useful as the chest or cassone. Besides its main use as a storage for clothes, linens, bedding, household utensils, etc., the earlier type with the flat tops were often used as tables and very often as seats, before chairs came into general use, being made more comfortable by the addition of large soft cushions. But besides this household use, they served the additional purpose of traveling coffers or trunks. The higher classes in Italy were

*Bode-Kuhnel, "Antique Rugs."



CARVED WALNUT CASSONE
Florentine, about 1560

much given to roving during this period and since the country was constantly in a state of warfare and bands of condottieri roamed at large, it was not safe to leave valuables at home, so that in addition to the clothing that was needful for the journey, these traveling chests contained money, jewels and other articles of value, to say nothing of bedding, carpets, weapons, cooking utensils, etc., since the few inns to be found offered for the most part nothing but bare walls and a fireplace.

A still further use that was made of the cassone was that of a wedding chest (the original of the modern "green trunk"), containing besides the bride's trousseau the many household effects that she brought to her new home. The number of these chests varied largely in accordance with the bride's wealth and social position, ranging from one or two for people of moderate circumstances to as many as fifty for the daughter of a wealthy patrician family. Arriving at the new home the chests were usually placed in the sleeping apartment at either side of the picturesque bed and were regarded as the most valued pieces of furniture in the palace. How cherished the wedding chest was is best witnessed by the fact that a great many of them were designed by the leading architects and artists of the day and often decorated with

paintings by the most famous painters. Thus we find in Florence that even men of the reputation of Botticelli, Filippino, Paolo Uccelli and Signorelli designed and executed paintings for the cassoni of leading families. Unfortunately few of these beautifully painted chests remain intact, for the painted panels have been removed and now hang as paintings in the largest museums. The magnificent Strozzi cassone, executed for the wedding of a Strozzi with a Medici in 1513, and now in the Kunstgewerbe Museum in Berlin, is of this type.*

Though the same general spirit pervades all Italian furniture of a given period, the different parts of Italy were so strongly individual in their art expression that it is not surprising to find a strong local character reflected in the decorative arts as well as in painting and sculpture. Like so many of the other arts, the art of furniture achieved its greatest perfection in Florence. The most ancient chests are of a squared oblong shape and are framed along their edges with heavy bands of iron and have handwrought iron handles at the ends. The Florentine chests of the late XIV and early XV centuries have for the most part flat tops, either straight or slightly convex sides imitating the sarcophagi of the ancient monuments then coming into vogue, and

*Wilhelm von Bode, "Italian Renaissance Furniture," 1921.

strong, simple bases with or without lion feet. In the matter of decoration the preference at this time was for intarsia or inlay of different colored woods. A number of the most noted Florentine architects and sculptors were also intarsia workers and often kept up their workshops long after they had won fame in other lines. This type is illustrated in the early Renaissance gallery in the Institute. Another favourite method of decoration in the latter part of the XV and early XVI century is the use

In the High Renaissance, coloring through painting, intarsia, etc., was abandoned, and rich carving takes its place. In the second and third decades of the XVI century, the influence of Michelangelo's activities as sculptor and architect was felt, and following the many new forms and concepts of the architecture, an abundance of new motives were furnished to cabinet workers. Wood was now left in its natural hue, sometimes strengthened by the addition of color pigments and well toned gild-



WALNUT CREDENZA
Florentine, XVII Century
Gift of Mrs. Griffith Ogden Ellis

of pastiglia or gesso work, a kind of plaster composition which was put on the chests in low relief and generally painted or gilded, sometimes covering the entire front and ends of the chest, again applied in panels inserted in rich frames of the same composition. This method was especially popular in Venice and the polychromed Venetian chest of the XV century in the Institute's collection is a good example of this type.

ing on some of the projecting ornaments. Though carving for decorative purposes was already an established art during the middle ages, and chests with Gothic motives, rosettes in geometric form and even figure designs were used, it was not until the height of the Renaissance that high-relief carving came into general use, assuming a magnificence in keeping with the sumptuous interiors of this period. Elaborate heraldic designs, tournament bouts,

scenes from ancient mythology and Roman history were carved with an elegance and freedom often bespeaking the work of a master artist, for it was not until after the middle of the Cinquecento that the separation between artist and craftsman, the designer and the artisan who carried out the design, became complete. At the corners we usually find vigorously formed masks, putti or sphinxes and in the center a cartouche with armorial bearings or emblems. The chest in the Institute's collection with carving in high relief representing a tournament scene illustrates this type.

The pair of chests recently acquired by the Institute date probably about 1550 or 1560 and though coming from Rome were doubtless made by Florentine workmen after Florentine models, as was practically all the best Roman furniture of this period. They exhibit the tendency which came into vogue at this time of surplanting the more elaborate and bold high-relief figures by a simpler leaf design on the profile of the chest. The concave flutings converge toward the center wreath-like cartouche which carries the heraldic design of the Florentine lily, a device used by many wealthy Italian families, though it came later, as the fleur-de-lis, to be particularly associated with the royal house of France. The conventionalized acanthus-leaf design

around the profile of the chest is repeated on a smaller scale along the edges of the cover which we now see to be of diminished size on the top, showing the later date of the chest, when they were no longer used as seats. The lion feet repeat a much employed motif found in the furniture not only of this but of many other periods and countries.

We have mentioned the fact that in the Italian household the cassone took the place of clothes and linen closets and that books and household utensils were usually kept in the crude, open, built-in cupboards. There was another piece of furniture, however, of which we have not spoken and which as it developed became a great favourite with the Italian. This was the credenza. In the early Renaissance it was a broad cupboard of medium height with several doors, making it possible to use the top as a sideboard. This form remained practically unchanged until the Baroque period, varying a little in height and following in construction the changing architectural styles. In the later types, as in the fine example recently presented to the Institute by Mrs. Griffith Ogden Ellis, an upright piece was attached, making it much like our modern sideboard. The intricate intarsia scroll work also belongs to this later period.

L. J. W.

“THE CEMETERY” BY JACOB VAN RUYSDAEL

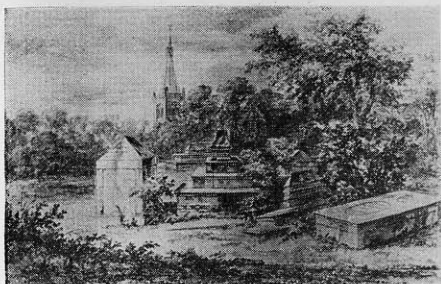
No representative collection of Dutch art is conceivable without a work by Jacob van Ruysdael, one of the greatest landscape painters in the history of art. The Art Institute has been fortunate in receiving as its first example by this artist not only a characteristic work of his brush, but one of the most important compositions he ever executed and the largest canvas known by him. *The Cemetery*, given by Mr. Julius H. Haass in memory of his brother, Dr. Ernest W. Haass, is a work of his best period, the 60s of the XVII century, when Dutch art was at its zenith and when Rembrandt

produced his greatest masterpieces. It shows the extraordinary combination that is typical of his best work: a most accurate observation of nature and a highly poetical imagination. It is a type of work in which, so far as its delineation is concerned, we feel a presentiment of some of the works of the Barbizon School, and from the standpoint of conventionalization one of the sources of the romanticism of the Turner period.

The history of the painting is very curious. It was known in France and England in the first half of the XIX century, and highly praised by the best con-



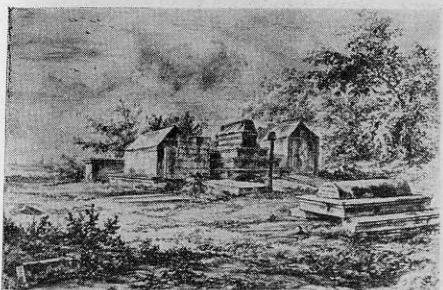
THE CEMETERY
JACOB VAN RUYSDAEL
Haarlem, 1629(P)—1680



DRAWING BY RUYSDAEL
TEYLER INSTITUTE, HAARLEM

noisseur of Dutch art of this time, John Smith, in his famous *Catalogue Raisonné* of the most eminent paintings of Dutch XVII century art. This writer, who very seldom gives more than a dry description of the many paintings he knows, extolls our picture in the following terms:

“This grand and affecting picture exhibits the ruins of a church and convent upon the summit of a hill, occupying the whole extent of the view in the second distance, the declivity of which presents a cemetery interspersed with large stones. In the foreground are a broken tree lying across a rapid stream, a tomb of black marble with an inscription on it; a row of three sarcophagi extending along the front; and on the left stands a cluster of large umbrageous trees, the verdant hues of whose foliage is contrasted by a leafless trunk of a beech. Three persons in black are seen near a small tomb on the side of



DRAWING BY RUYSDAEL
TEYLER INSTITUTE, HAARLEM

the hill, musing amidst the tombs. The grandeur and solemnity of the scene is strikingly enhanced by rolling stormy clouds, in which may be perceived the evanescent colors of a rainbow. In this excellent picture the artist has evidently intended to convey a moral lesson of human life, and in addition to this there is a sublimity of sentiment and effect reigning throughout the composition which renders it worthy of the powers of Nicolas Poussin.

“The writer has been informed that this picture was purchased by Mr. Huybens (by whom it was imported into England), of a banker at Paris,



“THE CEMETERY,” BY RUYSDAEL
DRESDEN GALLERY

about the year 1815, for the sum of 20,000 francs (£800), and sold to Mr. George Gillows, of whose executors it was bought by Mr. Zachary, and was subsequently sold, in the sale of that gentleman’s collection, by Mr. Phillips, in 1828, for 870 guineas; it is now in the possession of — Mackintosh, Esq.

“A duplicate of the preceding picture, but differing in size and inferior in quality, having become dark from time, is in the Dresden Gallery.”

In the new scientific edition of Smith, by Hofstede de Groot, the Dresden picture is put in place of this one, as our picture had disappeared from the eyes of con-

noisseurs since about 1840, and it is only mentioned that Smith knew of a similar work of which the Dresden version is said to be a duplicate.

In an excellent essay on the two versions by Dr. Rosenberg,* written since our picture turned up in London last year and was exhibited at the Academy Exhibition in Berlin, he points out convincingly that the Dresden picture is not a duplicate but a picture differing considerably in the general composition as well as in details. The ruined castle behind the tombs is different, the waterfall and the trees falling over it have been changed, there is a different arrangement in the group of oaks at the right, etc.

It happens that the motif which Ruysdael used for this picture can still be compared with the original spot where he made his studies. The three tombs in the foreground are still in existence, forming a part of the burying ground of the Portuguese Jews at Oudekerk, which was consecrated in 1614. We even know who are buried in the tombs: the first is that of Dr. Montalto, the physician of the French king Henry IV, who died in 1615; the tomb in the middle is that of the Super Rabbi of Amsterdam, Chacham Usiel, from Fez, Morocco, and in the third Abraham Israel Mendes was buried in 1627.

A general idea may be conceived of the cemetery, as it still exists, from the two studies by Ruysdael, preserved in the Teyler Institute in Haarlem. They represent the three tombs—one showing them as they appear in the picture, the other from the back with the little church of Oudekerk in the distance, a variation which we know from one of the drawings by Rembrandt. The studies show that the region was flat and that Ruysdael

built up an absolutely new composition, transforming it into a mountainous country with oak forests, waterfalls, and a ruined church in the background. From this instance alone we are able to judge the creativeness of his imagination, for we realize that he intended to give to his picture more than the literal representation of reality and that it is a symbolical expression of an idea; for, as Goethe pointed out in his essay on the Dresden picture, he evidently wishes to show the transitoriness and final decay of all things—the forms of nature as well as those created by human hands, but that in the breaking of the clouds and in the rainbow we have also the promise of renewed life and hope.

There has been long a fruitless discussion as to whether Ruysdael or Hobbema was the greatest landscape painter in Dutch art. They are both masters of great genius, differing so much in temperament that it is difficult to make comparisons. Ruysdael, who was the master of Hobbema, is certainly a more versatile artist, has more imagination, and if his work does not appear to be so cheerful and optimistic as Hobbema's, it always expresses a deeper feeling. While Hobbema copies nature more directly, there is a human sentiment in Ruysdael's landscapes that has seldom been surpassed in the history of landscape art, and which is brought out most strongly in the painting which Mr. Haass has given to the Institute. For in this, as in all really great art, there is something more than a true impression of nature shown in the details of rocks, trees and clouds,—a grandeur and sublimity of conception that gives meaning to the composition.

W. R. V.

*Art in America, February, 1926.

SECOND LOAN EXHIBITION OF OLD MASTERS

The most important event during the past month was the Second Loan Exhibition of Old Masters, showing British paintings of the late XVIII and early XIX centuries, marking almost as great an epoch in the aesthetic history of Detroit as did the Dutch exhibition of last year. The exhibition, comprising six paintings by Gainsborough, eight by Hoppner, seven by Lawrence, five by Raeburn, five by Reynolds, thirteen by Romney and one by Van Dyck, also representing adequately Constable and Turner, the two great landscape painters of the period, was made possible by the generosity of important private collectors of the United States, including a number in Detroit, who kindly loaned their pictures for this occasion.

This generous attitude has enabled thousands of Detroiters to see what has undoubtedly been the most representative collection of British painting of this period that has ever been brought together at one time in America.

The enthusiasm engendered by the exhibition took a substantial form in a subscription list to buy a work of the English school in remembrance of this exhibition, and more than \$12,000 has so far been subscribed for this purpose.

As a supplement to the next number of the Bulletin we will publish reproductions of the more important works as a souvenir that will recall to our readers the greatness of this exhibit.

ANNUAL EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS BY MICHIGAN ARTISTS

The Annual Exhibition of Paintings by Michigan Artists held during January shows a growth both in the number of exhibits and exhibitors. The jury, consisting of Charles W. Hawthorne, nationally known painter, chairman; Dr. W. R. Valentiner and Mr. John P. Wicker, were more tolerant toward modern art than Michigan artists juries have been heretofore, with the result that the exhibition has been more catholic in its representation. The prizes were awarded as follows:

Scarab Club Gold Medal:

Judson Smith, for his "*Self Portrait.*"

Detroit Museum of Art Founders Society Prize:

Francis P. Paulus, for his "*Fish Market, Bruges.*"

Frank C. Hecker Prize:

Isaac Rader, for his "*Portrait of a Girl.*"

Austin A. Howe Prize:

Alfred Hutty, for his etching, "*Little Italy.*"

Frederick Zeigen Prize:

A. Castagne, for his "*Still Life.*"

Mrs. Herbert C. Munro Prize:

Sophie Gurvitch, for her decoration, "*Composition: Diana.*"

Mrs. Neville Walker Purchase Prize:

Glen Tracy, for his water color, "*October Snow.*"

Mrs. August Helbig Prize:

Samuel Cashwan, for his sculpture, "*The Secret.*"

Society of Jewish Artists Gold Prize:

Joseph Stermer, for his "*Moonlight.*"

Sixty pictures from the exhibition were selected by a jury to go on tour of the State. They will be shown in Ann Arbor, Jackson, Grand Rapids and Muskegon.

FEBRUARY AND MARCH EVENTS

- February 7, Sunday, 3:30 P. M. Lecture, "The Fjords of America" by Mr. L. O. Armstrong.
- February 9, Tuesday, 8:15 P. M. Lecture, "The Art Spirit" by Mr. Homer Saint Gaudens.
- February 13, Saturday, 10:00 A. M. Children's Program.
- February 14, Sunday, 3:30 P. M. Musical program under the direction of the Chamber Music Society of Detroit.
- February 20, Saturday, 10:00 A. M. Children's Program.
- February 21, Sunday, 3:30 P. M. Lecture, "From Cairo to Cape" Part I, by Mr. E. S. George.
- February 22, Monday, 8:00 P. M. Lecture "Graphic Arts and Fifty Best Books of 1925" by Mr. William A. Ketrtridge.
- February 23, Tuesday, 8:15 P. M. Lecture, "The Charm of the Print" by Mr. Albert Sterner.
- February 28, Sunday, 3:30 P. M. Lecture, "From Cairo to Cape" Part II, by Mr. E. S. George.
- March 6, Saturday, 10:00 A. M. Children's Program.
- March 7, Sunday, 3:30 P. M. Lecture "A Bride of Botticelli's Day and Her Household Gear" by Mrs. Charles Whitmore.