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The Early Fountains At Versailles. By Pierre De Nolhac.

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## The Early Fountains at Versailles

perhaps the best remembered of all his pictures of this period—and the portrait of *Madame Gautreau*, over which Parisian critics were wildly excited on account of its audacity of treatment and novelty of manner. Although he made Paris his headquarters, he was, however, by no means always at work there. He paid visits at more and more frequent intervals to London, where, year by year, his reputation was growing as surely as it had in France; and finally, some half-dozen years after his trip into Spain, he crossed the Channel, not on a visit, but to take up his abode permanently in England. Since then, there has been no break in a progress that has brought him into the innermost sanctuary of British art, and his election as an Associate of the Academy in 1894, and as a Royal Academician in 1897, have followed as a matter of course.

In the twenty years, or so, over which his practice has so far extended he has proved himself capable of many things, and has made excursions into many fields of art. Far the largest share of his time, however, has been given to portrait painting, and, in any record of his production, what he has done in this branch of work calls for the chief attention. His portraits, indeed, make up a long list punctuated by great successes. Few of his canvases could with justice be ignored, or passed over as commonplace or uninteresting, but every now and then he has made a leap forward in which with a single stride he has covered more ground than other men can pass over with a decade of assiduous toil; and, curiously, after each advance there has been no perceptible recoil to prepare for the next effort. If he marks one year by a success, in the next, though he may possibly not provide another sensation, he brings up all his canvases to the level of the best that has gone before. It is this faculty that gives him a hold upon even that section of the public which does not understand him. No one can prophesy exactly what he will do next, and he keeps alive a spirit of speculation that is most fascinating to everyone who loves surprises.

There are not many gaps in the series of portraits which he has, since he first began exhibiting in this country, contributed to the chief London galleries. He has been fairly prolific, especially of late years, and he has almost always added to the interest of the exhibitions in which he has appeared: *Mrs. H. White* (1884), *Lady Playfair* (1885), the admirable group of *The Misses Vickers* (1886), the masterly picture of *Mrs. Henry*

*G. Marquand* (1888), were the most memorable of his canvases during the period that ended with his migration from Paris to London. Since then he has given us *La Carmencita*, at the Academy in 1891, and now hanging in the Luxembourg; and, also at the Academy, *Lady Agnew* (1893), *Miss Chamler* (1894); *W. Graham Robertson, Esq.*, *Mrs. Russell Cooke*, and the two portraits of *Mr. Coventry Patmore*, in 1895; *The Right Hon. Joseph Chamberlain*, *Mrs. Ian Hamilton*, *Sir George Lewis*, and *Mrs. Colin Hunter*, all in 1896; *Mrs. Carl Meyer*, one of his happiest pieces of unconventional composition, and *The Hon. Laura Lister*, a delightful study of dainty childhood, in 1897; three of the strongest renderings that he has ever produced of male sitters, *Francis Cranmer Penrose, Esq., P.R.I.B.A.*, *Sir Thomas Sutherland, G.C.M.G., M.P.*, and *Asher Wertheimer, Esq.*, with several others, in 1898; and last year four equally notable paintings of feminine sitters, *Mrs. Charles Hunter*, *Miss Octavia Hill*, *Miss Jane Evans*, and *Lady Faudel-Phillips*. To the New Gallery he has sent from time to time pictures of superlative quality, among them more than one that can fairly be said to mark great moments in his practice. There was the great full length of *Mrs. Hammersley*, for instance; and the more recent, but somewhat similar, portrait of *Mrs. Thursby*; and there have been besides *The Countess Clary Aldringen*, *Mrs. George Swinton*, *Mrs. Ernest Franklin*, and *Mrs. Anstruther Thomson*, as well as the vividly realised and intensely characteristic half length of *Colonel Ian Hamilton*, which was at the gallery last summer. A few other important works, like the character portrait, *Miss Ellen Terry as "Lady Macbeth,"* and the occasional canvases which he contributed to the exhibitions of the New English Art Club, while he was a member of that society, have found their way to other galleries. Altogether his record in this direction is an ample one, and it is not less deserving of comment on account of the sustained effort to reach a high standard to which it bears witness than it is as a proof of indefatigable energy and zealous practice.

(To be continued.)

## THE EARLY FOUNTAINS AT VERSAILLES. BY PIERRE DE NOLHAC.

THE fountains in the Gardens of Versailles have enjoyed a curious celebrity from the first. The difficulty experienced by the engineers in the matter of supplying running water to a place

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LE BASSIN D'APOLLON

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH

entirely lacking thereof increased the interest inspired by the fountains themselves. How great this interest was may be gathered from the memoirs of the period, and even in the published diplomatic correspondence. To this one part of his great Versailles scheme Louis XIV. devoted himself without ceasing, and infinite were the pains bestowed upon it. When receiving foreign sovereigns and princes at Versailles, the King never forgot to include in the programme a ceremonious visit to the fountains.

Of all this great collection of hydraulic works, with which the names of Colbert, the architect in chief, and Francine, the engineer, will ever be associated, there remains to-day but one portion intact. Many of the basins, however, have preserved their full effect, while their canalization is still as it was originally. During the last few years, moreover, others which seemed irretrievably ruined have been successfully repaired. Nowadays the fountains—the *grandes eaux*—delight the masses of Sunday holiday-makers just as they delighted and astonished the lieges of his Majesty more than two centuries ago. But the intelligent visitor pays

chief attention to the work of the master sculptors who adorned these famous relics.

Among this army of statues, all conceived in the pompous fashion of the *grand siècle*, one perceives that those done in lead have, almost without exception, more life and movement in them than the marbles by the self-same artists. It must not be supposed that works at Versailles were all executed and erected at one and the same period; it is evident, on the contrary, that the undertaking was one of long duration, statue after statue, stone after stone, being produced and put into its allotted place in regular sequence. From the day when the young King for the first time restored the hunting-box of his predecessor, Louis XIII., and set up these wonderful fountains, his architects, Le Vau and Mansart, were kept constantly at work, one after the other. Thrice was the scheme for the *ensemble* of the Château and its grounds revised before it finally took the form in which we see it to-day. And Le Nôtre, the architect of the gardens, was called upon to show just as much ingenuity and energy as his *confrères*. When one reads in Dangeau that the King has been to inspect

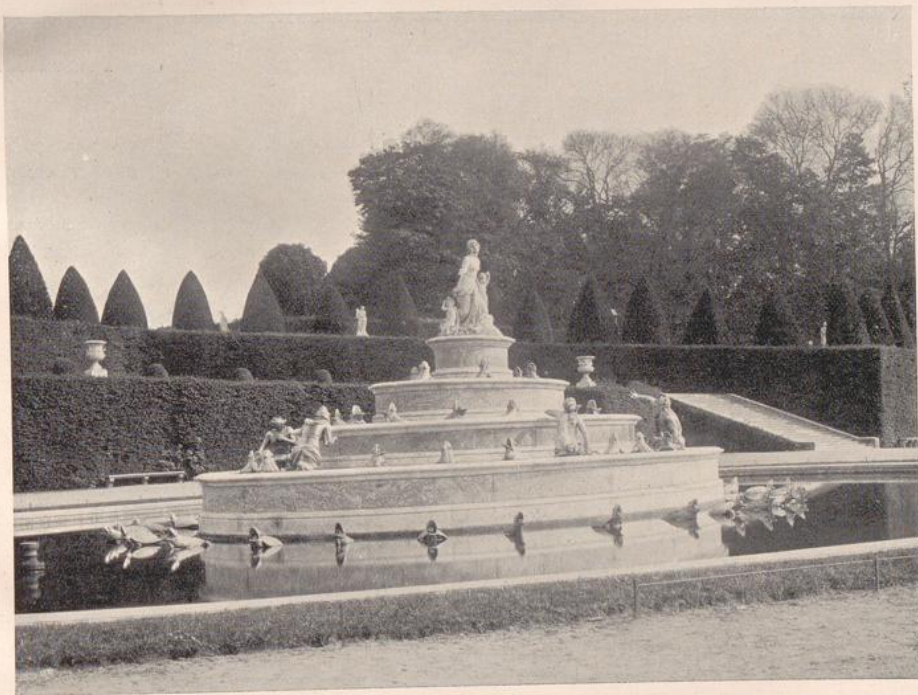
## The Early Fountains at Versailles

such and such a fountain, and is "perfectly satisfied" with it, one may be sure that he will speedily cause it to be demolished, and order something even more elaborate in its place. Thus it is that many of the things known to us from contemporary plates have disappeared entirely, their loss, in some cases, giving cause for regret.

The oldest of the fountains were placed close to the Château itself; they were decorated in 1666, and were styled *L'Amour* and *La Sirène*. Changes in the disposition of the gardens caused their removal shortly afterwards. A work of greater importance—the *Fontaine du Dragon*—was destroyed in the reign of Louis XV. In the centre was a dragon, from whose mouth issued a stream of water some 28 metres high, while four dolphins were represented swimming round the monster. Seated on swans were Cupids discharging their arrows at the dragon. The brothers Marsy were responsible for the modelling of this group, which, with quite superfluous zeal, was re-constituted some ten years ago. The work produced by the admirable modern sculptors entrusted with this undertaking was altogether out of keeping with the

decorative style of Versailles; and the new *Bassin du Dragon* affords striking proof of the impossibility of reconstituting satisfactorily a perished work of art. Let us hope the taste for such experiments is past, and that for the future we may content ourselves with reverently preserving the masterpieces which Time has spared.

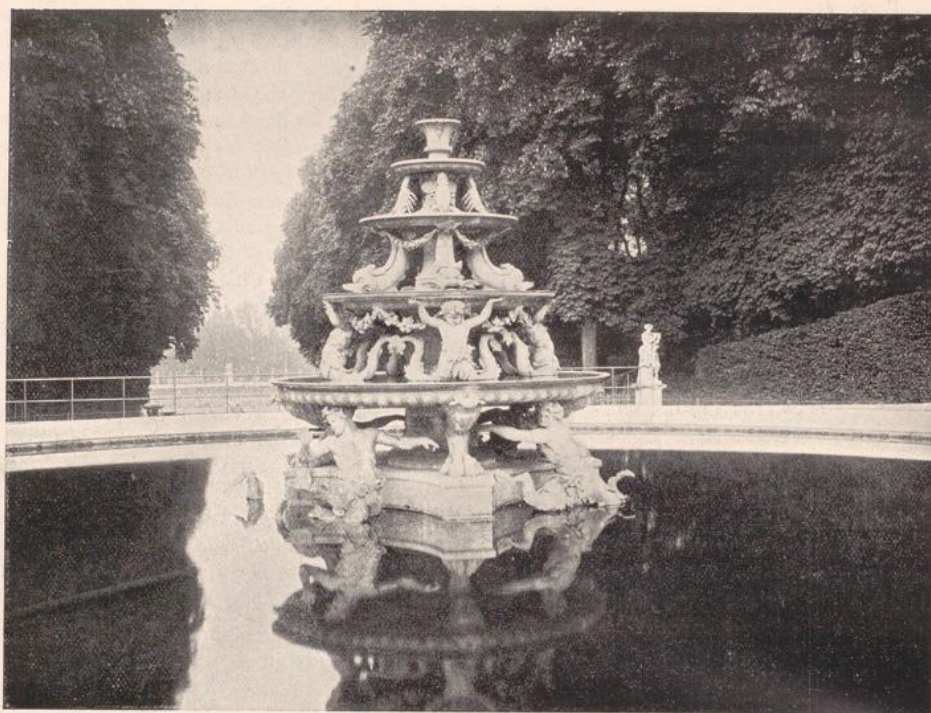
Other two great decorative fountains were ordered with those of the Dragon. They were placed in the centre of the Gardens at the axis of the view from the Château to the Grand Canal, which was being dug at the time. These ornamental waters were intended to mark the two extremities of the Allée Royale. They are still to be seen, the one called *Latone*, the other *Apollon*. The latter, with its magnificent leaden group,—irreverently known to-day as the *Char embourbé*, or "cart in the mud"—remains precisely as it was originally. At first it was called the *Bassin des Cygnes*, being stocked with Denmark swans, purchased by Colbert. In 1668, as Mlle. de Scudéry tells us, the fountain contained "an infinity of tiny jets of water, which, combined, made up a stream of extraordinary height and volume." The commission for the



LE BASSIN DE LATONE

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH

## The Early Fountains at Versailles



LA PYRAMIDE

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH

ornamental group was shortly afterwards entrusted to a Roman sculptor, settled in France, one J. B. Tubi, who in due course became one of the most prominent among the numerous decorators at Versailles. On the 5th of February, 1669, he received his first payment "for the fountain decoration representing the Rising Sun," and in the following year he completed the god, the chariot and the horses, which were transported by fifty "*petits maîtres déchargeurs de pierre sur le port de Paris*" from the capital to Sèvres by water, and thence by wagon to Versailles. The whales and the tritons were added shortly afterwards, and the artist received in all, 15,000 livres for his colossal work. The ornamentation of the Apollo basin was like that of all the fountains of the period, done in what, for convenience sake, was termed lead, but was really a special material, which contemporary documents simply styled *métail*, or metal. It was actually a mixture of lead and tin. The old descriptions often speak of "gilded bronze," but that was a mere *façon de parler*. As a matter of fact, the statues were frequently being re-coated

with bronze paint. Tubi's figures were painted in this way, immediately after their erection. Gilding was no longer required.

The ornamentation of the *Bassin de Latone*, as we see it to-day, belongs unquestionably to the Louis Quatorze period; but at the same time it is not quite as originally designed. The brothers Marsy had this commission simultaneously with Tubi's commission for the "Apollo," and the rival sculptors finished their work practically at the same time. In the course of his friendly relations with the artists of the day, La Fontaine saw the Marsys' model in their studio, and described it in exaggerated verse:—

Au bas de ce degré, Latone et ses gémeaux  
De gens durs et grossiers font de vils animaux,  
Les changent avec l'eau que sur eux ils répandent. . . .  
La scène est un bassin d'une vaste étendue.

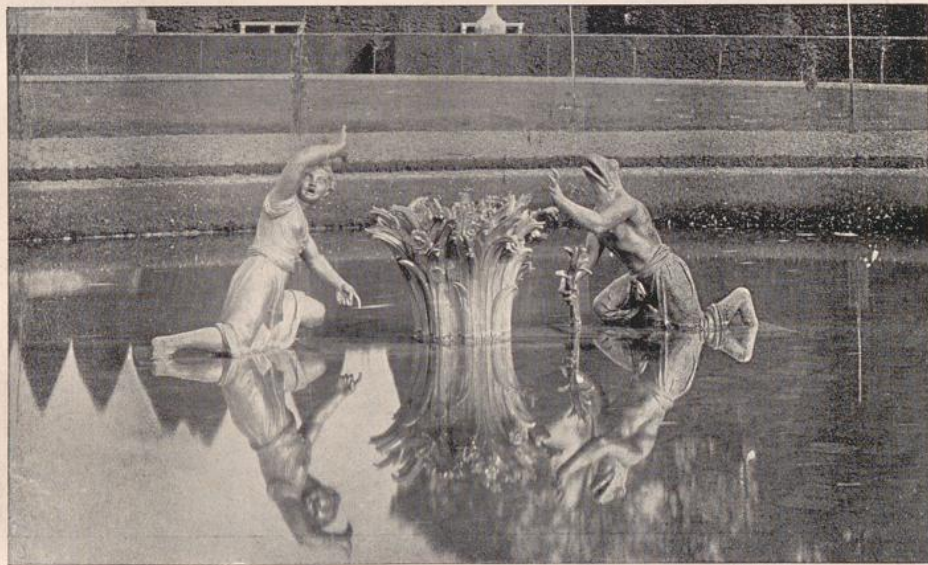
When, on the 24th of December, 1670, the Marsys received their full payment of 5,000 livres, the fountain adorned by their statues was just as it is represented in the old-fashioned plates. The "Latona" group is situated on a rock, but slightly

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FONTAINE DU PARTERRE DE LATONE

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH



FONTAINE DU PARTERRE DE LATONE

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH

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raised above the level of the basin, and surrounded by reeds. Of recent years an attempt has been made to reproduce, by means of "industrial gold," the old effect produced originally by simple painting.

The *Allée d'Eau* was a decoration of a novel sort, devised from the imagination of Claude Perrault, the doctor-architect, brother of the writer of the world-famed fairy tales. The groups were placed in position in the spring of 1670, and the ornamentation of the two big fountains followed quickly. The *Allée* was bordered by pine trees and by a hundred and four copper vases containing yews. Le Brun designed all the sculpture. The groups of children, placed two by two in such a manner as not to be monotonous to the eye, demanded a great number of preliminary sketches, and among the great artist's papers may be found numerous "ideas," treating the subject from various standpoints. The King chose the design which most happily suggested the suppleness of the youthful forms and the grace of their several attitudes. The groups were divided among Le Gros, Lerambert, and Le Hongre. To the last-named, with Benoit Massou, were entrusted the fruits and flowers. All that remains to us now of

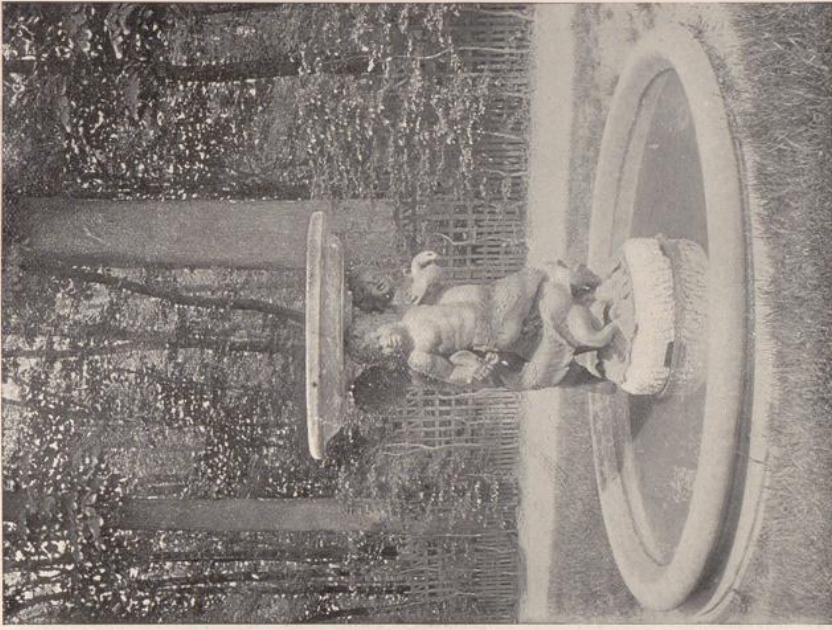
this decoration is the series of seven plates of the *Allée d'Eau* engraved by Le Pautre in 1672 by command of the King.

These delightful works, wherein the graces of childhood are shown in so lively and supple a fashion, have a curiously complicated history, as the accounts in connection with their payment reveal. In the first place, their number was soon increased when the vast lateral groves were reformed and the *Allée d'Eau* was extended in semi-circular form. Le Gros, Massou, and Mazeline were called on to furnish models for the two new sets of four groups, eight groups in all. For these the first payments were made to the sculptors in May, 1678. All the groups in the lower part of the *Allée* appear to be inferior to the older figures; but what the accounts clearly reveal is this: neither in the first nor the second series are these the original works. The originals were done in a *métail*—an amalgam of lead and tin—painted from time to time, as we have already seen, with a golden bronze; the plinths and the basins themselves were of the same material, painted bronze colour. Not till a later period, when real bronze was introduced into Versailles in the famous castings of the *Parterre d'Eau*, do the documents contain ought to excite



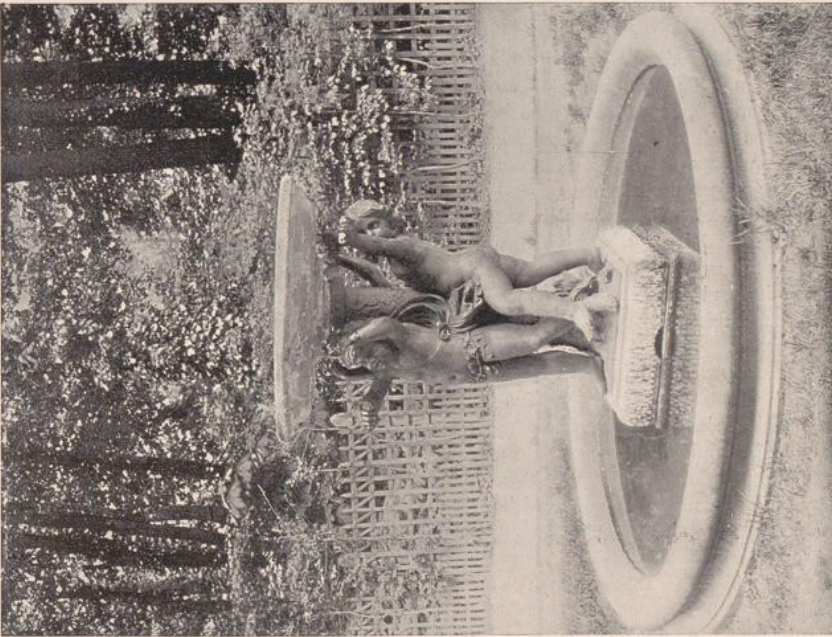
LE BASSIN DE FLORE

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH



FROM A PHOTOGRAPH

LES MARMOUSETS



FROM A PHOTOGRAPH

LES MARMOUSETS



## The Early Fountains at Versailles



LE BASSIN DE CÉRÈS

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH

our curiosity. But what are these "moulds and wax impressions of the *Allée du Dragon* and the *Allée d'Eau*" made in 1684 by the *sculpteurs-fondeurs* Varin and Langlois, and these "models of groups of children reformed by Mélo, the sculptor, from clay and wax, for the *Allée de la Pyramide*," if not the preparations for a casting *à cire perdue* of the old leaden figures, which are evidently to be replaced? This is further indicated, it appears to me, by the sums paid from time to time to Varin, Meunier, and Langlois on account of the children's groups which they cast in bronze for the *Allée des Cascades*.

In the autumn of 1688 we find the old groups along the *Allée* being replaced by bronze reproductions, while the metal basins are being removed and marble substituted, and the plinths changed in the same way. The marble employed was that fine red variety from Languedoc, of which Louis XIV. was so fond; and there was no longer any necessity for ornamental flowers and fruits, the beauty of the material sufficing for these twenty-two final fountains.

The works of 1688 were thus modelled on those of 1668 and 1678, each successive decade witness-

ing a transformation of the delightful *Allée d'Eau*. No more striking evidence could one find of the continuity of the labours bestowed by the King in the adornment of his domain. It should be noted, moreover, in justification of the taste of the seventeenth century, that, with the exception of the children placed on Lerambert's Sphinxes (which were gilded in 1670 and expressly "ungilded" in 1685), no gilt was applied to any one of the fine bronzes now in existence at Versailles. Gilding was confined to the lead, which alone required it; no attempt was ever made to give a false and over-rich appearance to bronze, that noblest of metals.

The big *morceaux* placed near the groups of Le Gros, Le Hongre and Lerambert were entrusted to a still more accomplished artist—of all the Versailles sculptors perhaps the greatest—François Girardon. The Pyramid was a long time in process of erection on account of the multiplicity of its ornamentations, and Girardon was still at work on it in 1672. The great *bas-relief* on the "Fontaine des Nymphes," sometimes styled "Le Bain de Diane," was finished in 1670, Charles Perrault attributing its design to his brother. "M. Girardon," he remarks, "added fresh beauties

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to those already in the scheme. This *bas-relief* is perhaps one of the finest hitherto produced." And even to this day, with its ruddy *patine*, it is certainly one of the most noble things to be seen in the Gardens. This *bas-relief* and the other details of the basin were entirely gilded. As for the pyramid which crowned the whole, one is conscious of a mingling of effects, the gold being confined to the figures, while the ornamentations are in bronze. The painter-gilder, Bailly, received in 1671, 1,400 livres "on account of the gilding and bronzing applied to the *fontaine en pyramide*." It is not always easy to grasp the exact meaning of notes such as this, but they are interesting, nevertheless, in regard to the history of the Gardens and their decoration.

Honour is certainly due to Le Brun as the inventor of the general *motif* of the Pyramid fountain; but it must be added that Girardon interpreted the painter's ideas with extreme fulness. His work, recently restored, still keeps its place above the *Allée d'Eau*, with its four superimposed basins, the highest resting on four crayfish serving as supports, the second borne by four dolphins, the third by four young Tritons, and the fourth by four Tritons of larger mould, who appear

to be swimming in the great lake hollowed out of the turf.

In the lower parts of the Gardens were erected the "Four Seasons." During the year 1672, the designs were produced, and Colbert distributed the work among the four chief sculptors of the day. Tubi took Spring (Flora); Regnaudin, Summer (Ceres); G. Marsy, Autumn (Bacchus); and Girardon, Winter (Saturn). Child forms were grouped around the chief figures, and there were other accessories in the form of garlands of flowers, which were destined soon to disappear.

To-day there remain but two of these groups, which, despite their modern renovation, are still charming. "Saturn" and "Bacchus" are intact, and will, I trust, remain so. Time has invested them with a delicate *patine*, in which one may see traces of the gilding of other days. They stand in a remote part of the park, and there, far from the crowd, their admirers—especially their poetical admirers—may often be seen in reverent admiration. Their quality is obvious, and needs no enhancement from the fugitive animation of the waters.

PIERRE DE NOLHAC.



LE BASSIN DE SATURNE

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH