THE MINIATURES OF MS. 616 HERE REPRODUCED

THE MS. 616 in the National Library in Paris, from which our forty-five facsimiles are taken, contains in all eighty-eight miniatures, the first being the coat-of-arms of the Saint Vallier family, and the last being a picture of Count Gaston de Foix, on his knees in front of an altar in his chapel. The latter picture illustrates the great veneur's "Prayers," some of which are written in French, others in Latin, that follow the sporting chapters. Of the remaining eighty-six miniatures the first is the frontispiece at the head of the prologue which has been reproduced in the volume now before the reader in colours as faithfully and true to the original as possible. Each of the other eighty-five illuminations illustrates a chapter, of which there are eighty-five. But as "Gaston Phoebus" deals with some animals left undescribed by the Duke of York, such as the bear, the reindeer, the ibex and the chamois, and moreover touches at length upon subjects with which our English classic does not deal, such as snares, traps, and other devices to destroy beasts of prey, it follows that a considerable number of illustrations relate to subjects not alluded to by the author of the "Master of Game." For this reason they would have been quite out of place in the present volume, however interesting some of them unquestionably are. For five of the pictures in MS. 616 that deal with nets, snares and shooting I was, however, tempted to find space in the present Appendix, for they treat of contrivances not unknown to British sportsmen in the old days. (*See* Appendices: Arms, Hare and Snares.)

As works of art, representatives of the excellence of French illuminators in the middle of the fifteenth century, the miniatures in MS. 616 are of high importance, not only to the student of venery, but also to the artist, for they afford rich material for the study of the gradual transition from mediæval to modern painting. That these pictures were limned at a period when the conventional manipulations of mediæval art were beginning to give way to modern ideas, is shown by the fact that in four of the eighty-six miniatures the richly coloured diapered background is replaced by an horizon of modern conception. This furnishes us with a clue respecting the date of their origin, for it enables us to say that they were painted towards the middle of the fifteenth century, or some five or six decades after the death of the author of the book.

In the opinion of one writer the miniatures are by the hand of the famous Jean Foucquet, born about 1415, who was made painter and *valet-de-chambre* to Charles VII. Amongst the choicest works of this artist, it is perhaps unnecessary to mention, is the "Book of Hours" that he executed for Estienne Chevalier, Charles VII.'s treasurer. Another "Hours" which he made for the Duchess of Cleves, and, yet more famous, the ninety miniatures of Chevalier's *Boccaccio* which is one of the principal treasures of the Royal Library in Munich, were among the best known works of Foucquet. In Count Bastard's monumental work there is a reproduction of one of his miniatures in which the foliage and scroll work bear resemblance with that to be seen in the frontispiece of the present volume. Other critics, amongst them Joseph Lavallée, say that they are not by Foucquet's hands, but possibly by an artist of his school. Lavallée's opinion, as that of the most distinguished and also most painstaking student of "*Gaston Phoebus*," deserves every

attention, and it is shared by the authorities at the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, who declare that absolutely nothing is known of the master who painted them. It is to be hoped that these magnificent illuminations will be made the object of renewed research before long.

To us they lose but little of their interest by their unknown parentage: as contemporary pictures of hunting customs, costumes and hunting weapons, they are of the highest interest. The hunting customs and hunting arms which they illustrate are dealt with under separate heads in the Appendix, and there only remains to make a few remarks concerning the costumes which they bring before our eyes with such painstaking minuteness.

In one respect we are forced to come to the conclusion that the miniaturist who made them gave his fancy rather freer scope than is in accord with the text. Gaston de Foix very particularly mentions that green was the colour of the huntsmen's dress for stag hunting, and grey for boar hunting. It is plain, therefore, that the kaleidoscopic array of bright blue, scarlet, purple, mauve and pink, which some of the groups of hunters present, was a distinct departure from the author's precepts. These bright-tinted *houppelandes*, coats and parti-coloured hose, which latter, when they were introduced into England, awakened even Chaucer's ire, causing him to liken the men wearing them to victims of St. Anthony's fire that had cankered and consumed one half of their bodies, would have been somewhat unsuitable clothing for men pursuing wary game through woods or fields, had it been really the case that huntsmen decked themselves out in these garish colours. But it is probable that this multi-coloured apparel did not exist in reality, except perhaps at great Court hunts, but was the result of artistic licence on the part of the illuminator, who probably deemed the truthful rendering of the clothes worn by veneurs as of trifling importance, in comparison with the bright and varied colouring of his illuminations. An artist who persistently depicted the horizon as a piece of diapered, many-coloured tapestry, or who painted his trees in full leaf when picturing a winter scene, such as is intended to be portrayed in Plate VIII., where men are warming themselves at a huge fire, would hardly scruple to give free reins to his passion for bright tints.

As our monochrome reproductions convey only imperfect impressions of colour values, a few remarks upon the tints of garments worn by the huntsmen in this Codex may be found useful by the student of mediæval costume. Of the frontispiece it is unnecessary to say anything, for, according to the verdict of competent official judges, it is a very faithful coloured reproduction of the original.

PLATE II. The trailing *houppelande* in which the master veneur is wrapped is ermine-lined and of a rich ultramarine tint. On this splendid garment are embroidered in gold griffons, and animals with long drooping tails. The hood and the pointed shoes or galogs are scarlet coloured, and a narrow white ruffle shows above the neckband of the hood.

Of the men to whom this gorgeously clad individual is holding forth his precepts of venery, the one nearest to him, as well as the third man, are clad in green coats, their hose being scarlet on one leg and blue on the other, the first man having black leather shoes on his feet. The second man has a grey coat, a blue hood and hose of a pinkish hue. The fourth man is a grey-haired and white-bearded veteran, who sports a blue cap and a scarlet hood and hose of the same tint, his coat being of a dark hue. The last man in the row has a grey coat, scarlet hood, the left leg clad in black and the right leg in scarlet hose. As in most of the hunting pictures we are struck by the absence of weapons; the only ones visible being a hunting knife, the gold-mounted handle of which protrudes from the pouch worn by the master, and a similar arm, silver-mounted, to be seen upon the person of the last man in the group. The broad baldricks to which the hunting horns are attached are black with silver bosses.

PLATE IV. The man's dress consists of a green coat, pinkish mauve hood, green stockings and a red belt.

PLATE V. The leading horseman has a scarlet cap, green coat, scarlet hose; the horseman behind him a green coat and cap, and their saddles are blue, while the horse's trappings are scarlet. The men on foot have green coats, scarlet under-coats and blue and scarlet hose, leaving the thigh uncovered.