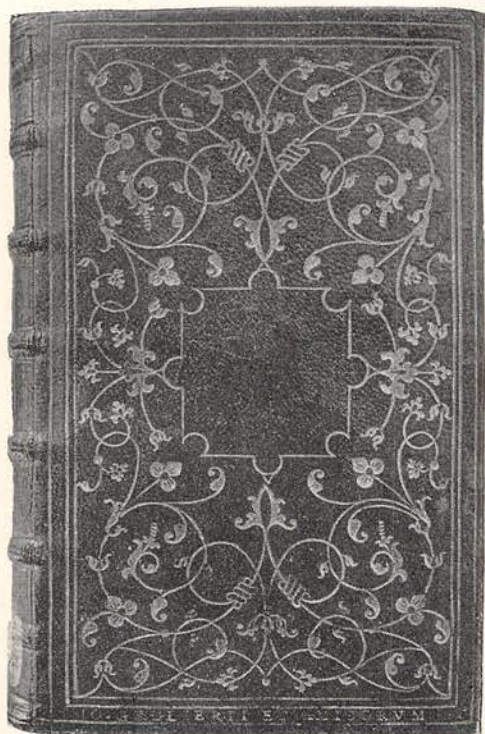


BOOKBINDINGS OF THE PAST.

NOTES OF A BOOK-LOVER.



"ERIZZO, DISCORSO SOPRA LE MODAGLIE ANTICHE," VENICE, 1559. IN 8VO (IMPRIMÉS EXPOSITION, NO. 526. PLAT RECTO). BOUND FOR GROLIER IN THE STYLE OF THOSE OF GEOFFROY TORV.

It is the only example known of work of this class bearing the name of Grolier. The device is on the verso. (From "Les Relieurs d'Art à la Bibliothèque Nationale." By permission of Edouard Rouveyre.)

SI begin to set down here these rambling impressions and stray suggestions about the great bookbinders of the past, I am reminded of a pleasant saying recorded in Burton's "Book-Hunter," that storehouse of merry jests against those who love books not wisely but too well. Burton tells us that in the hearing of a certain dealer in old tomes and rare volumes a remark was ventured that such an one was "said to know something about books," which brought forth the fatal answer: "He know about books? Nothing—nothing at all, I assure you; unless, perhaps, about their insides."

The pertinence of this retort to myself, just now, I cannot but confess at once. What I know best about books is their insides. And yet, perhaps, it is not an unpardonable sin for

an author to concern himself also with the outside of books—if so be he love them, if he care for tall copies, if he be capable of cherishing the good edition, the one with the misprint. This is why I am emboldened to risk myself in a voyage of retrospection in search of the masters and the masterpieces of the bibliopegic art.

I.

GROLIER AND THE RENASCENCE.

IN a letter written to a friend in April, 1518, Erasmus highly praised the civility, the modesty, the integrity, and the munificence of his correspondent, and added, "You owe nothing to books, but in the future books will give you an eternal glory."

The man to whom this was written was a Viscount of Aguisy, for a while treasurer of the army of Italy, then French ambassador to Rome, and afterward treasurer of France under Francis I., Henry II., Francis II., and Charles IX. "Born in 1479, dying in 1565, he lived eighty-six years,"—so M. Le Roux de Lincy, his biographer, tells us,—“during which he showed himself always a zealous protector of the learned, a lover of the good and beautiful books issued by the Giunti and the Aldi, or by the other publishers of the time, and also an ardent collector of coins and of antiquities.” Yet the prediction of Erasmus has so far come true that the name of the ambassador and treasurer of France would be forgotten were it not that the fame of the book-lover has lingered, and spread, until now, more than three centuries after the death of Jean Grolier of Lyons, there is a flourishing club called by his name here in New York, the chief city of a continent undiscovered when he was born.

Grolier had the good fortune to live through the glorious years of the Renaissance, when all the arts were reviving at once and flourishing together; and he had the good judgment to aid in the development of the art of book-binding, to which he attached his name inseparably. The art was not new when he began to collect the best works of the best printers, but it was about to have a new birth; and when it was born again, Grolier helped to guide its early steps. Perhaps the first book-binder was the humble workman who collected the baked clay tiles on which the Assyrians wrote their laws; and he was a bookbinder

also who prepared a protecting cylinder to guard the scrolls of papyrus on which Vergil, and Horace, and Martial had written their verses.

Before the invention of printing, the choicer manuscripts, books of hours, and missals, were made even more valuable by sides of carved ivory, or of delicately wrought silver often studded with gems. Even after printing was invented, the binder was called upon only to stitch the leaves of the book, all further deco-

and again they were hollowed out to hold a crucifix or a pair of spectacles, although sometimes it was only to make room for an almanac. It is no wonder that when a tome thus ponderously begirt fell upon Petrarch it so bruised his leg that for a while there was danger of amputation. Even when these real boards were thin, they were thick enough to conceal a worm, that worst of all the enemies of books; and thus real boards, like the German *condottieri* in many an Italian city, destroyed what they were meant to protect. In time the genuine board was given up for a pasteboard, which was then made by pasting together sheets of paper, and myriads of pages of books no longer in fashion were thus destroyed to stiffen the covers of newer volumes. In our day many an interesting fragment of a forgotten author, and not a few curious and instructive engravings, have been rescued from oblivion, when the decay of old book-covers has led to the picking apart of the pasteboards beneath the crumbling leather.

With the invention of printing, and the immediate multiplication of books, there came an urgent demand for workmen capable of covering a volume in seemly fashion. In many a monastery the binderies must have been increased hastily to meet the demand, and we can trace the handiwork of these monastic craftsmen by the designs they imprinted on the covers of the books they bound—designs made up mainly of motives from the manuscript missals, from the typographic ornaments of the early printers, and from the transcripts of those carvings in wood and stone with which the churches of that time were abundantly enriched.

But the workshops in the monasteries did not suffice, and leatherworkers of all sorts—saddlers, harness-makers, and those who put together the elaborate boots and



BINDING EXECUTED FOR THO. MAIOLI, 1536. (FROM "MANUEL HISTORIQUE ET BIBLIOGRAPHIQUE DE L'AMATEUR DE RELIURE." BY PERMISSION OF LÉON GRUEL.)

shoes of the times—were impressed into the service, taking over to the new trade of book-binding, not only their skill in dealing with leather, but also the tools and the designs with which they had been wont to decorate the boots, the saddles, the harness, and the caskets of fair ladies and lords of high degree. For the most part these were humble artisans, lacking even in the rudiments of learning. The authorities in France preferred the workman to be ignorant who was called in to bind the records of the State and the royal books of

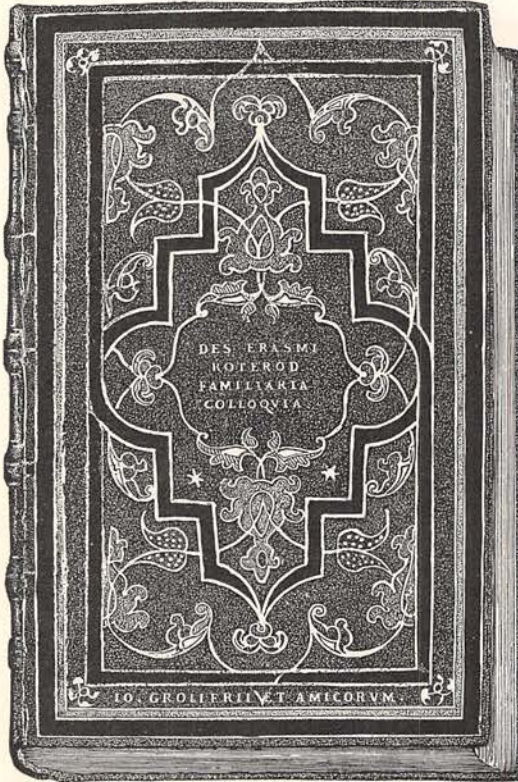
ration being the privilege of the silversmith. Benvenuto Cellini was paid six thousand crowns for the golden cover, carved and enriched with precious stones, which he made for a book that Cardinal de' Medici wished to give Charles V. In France the silversmiths claimed the monopoly of binding, and also of dealing in the finer stuffs—not merely in cloth-of-gold, but even in velvet.

Certain of the books bound in the monasteries were incased in boards—veritable boards, of actual wood—so thick that now

shoes of the times—were impressed into the service, taking over to the new trade of book-binding, not only their skill in dealing with leather, but also the tools and the designs with which they had been wont to decorate the boots, the saddles, the harness, and the caskets of fair ladies and lords of high degree. For the most part these were humble artisans, lacking even in the rudiments of learning. The authorities in France preferred the workman to be ignorant who was called in to bind the records of the State and the royal books of

account. The late Édouard Fournier, in his essay on the "Art de la Reliure en France," cites the contract of one Guillaume Ogier in Italy, 1492, as a binder of the registers of the treasury, in which the artisan "declared and made oath that he knew not how to read nor to write."

Perhaps one reason for the superiority of the early Italian bindings over the French of the same period was that the workmen employed



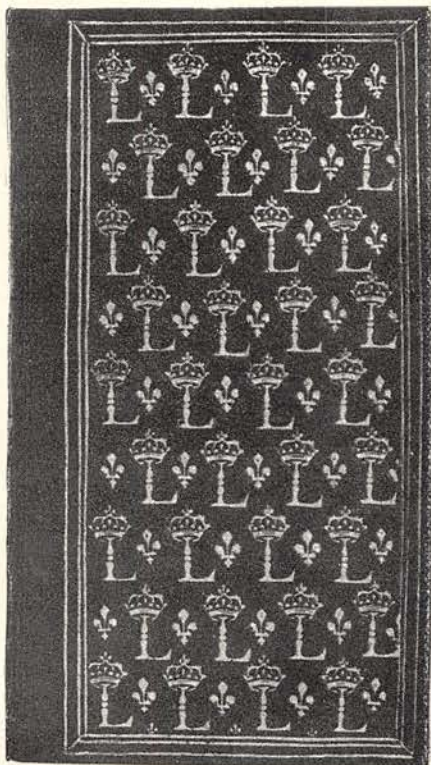
"COLLOQUIES OF ERASMUS," BASEL, 1537. QUARTO, 7 x 4½ INCHES; BROWN CALF. (FROM BLENHEIM COLLECTION. OWNED BY MR. BRAYTON IVES.)

in Italy were more intelligent and better educated. In a book printed by Aldus in 1513, the notice to the binder is in Greek! Ambrose Firmin-Didot explained the anomaly of this apparently extraordinary culture on the part of the handicraftsmen of that era by suggesting that the workmen employed by Aldus—who was binder as well as printer—were many of them Greeks who had been driven to Venice after the taking of Constantinople by the Turks. Every reader of "Romola" will remember the influence exercised on the Italian renaissance by the personal presence of the Greeks, and in no art was this influence more immediate, more permanent, or more beneficial, than in the art of bookbinding.

We know that Grolier was in Italy in 1512, and that he was still at Milan in 1525. He was a friend and a patron of Aldus. "No book left the Aldine press," M. Le Roux de Lincy declares, "without several copies, some on vellum," some on white or colored paper, being specially printed for the library of the French collector. Voltaire says that "a reader acts toward books as a citizen toward men; he does not live with all his contemporaries, he chooses a few friends." Grolier chose for his friends the best books and the most beautiful; he was fond of a good author no less than of a wide margin. As Dr. Holmes tells us, a library "is a looking-glass in which the owner's mind is reflected"; and it is a noble portrait of the man which we get when we look at the books of Jean Grolier. He was a lover of the New Learning. His praises are repeated in many a dedication from the scholars and the publisher-printers of the period. Many a book was brought out wholly, or partly, at his expense. The managers of the Aldine press often borrowed money from him, and never applied in vain. He quarreled once with Benvenuto Cellini, but he was a close friend of Geoffroy Tory. He was a scholar, as is attested by the elegant Latinity of his extant correspondence. He was an artist of not a little skill with the pencil, as a sketch in his copy of the "Maxims" of Erasmus proves.

Fournier thought that perhaps Grolier himself designed the graceful arabesques and interwoven bands which characterize the covers of his books. "Compared with the other bindings of the same time, and of the same country, those of Grolier are distinguished by an unequaled and unerring taste." They are closely akin to the bindings executed for Aldus in Venice, and to the bindings then made by the Italian workmen elsewhere in Italy, in France, and even in England: but they are somehow superior; they have a note of their own; they are the result of a finer artistic sense; and the longer I study the books bound during the Italian renaissance, the more I am inclined to agree with Fournier when he asserts that Grolier, "with Italian methods, created a French art." Certainly he gave to his library so definite an individuality that the volumes which composed it three hundred years ago are now treated as veritable works of art; they have their catalogue, like the pictures of a great painter, or the plates of a great engraver; they are numbered. Every existing book bound for Grolier has its pedigree, and is traced lovingly from catalogue to catalogue of the great collectors.

The beauty of the Grolier bindings is in the lavish and tasteful ornamentation of the sides. In



BINDING EXECUTED BY CLOVIS ÈVE FOR LOUIS XIII.
(FROM "MANUEL HISTORIQUE ET BIBLIOGRAPHIQUE DE
L'AMATEUR DE RELIURE," BY PERMISSION OF LÉON
GRUEL.)

the early days of printing, and when the traditions of the days of manuscripts still were dominant, the shelves of a library inclined like a reading-desk, and the handsome volumes lay on their sides, taking their ease. Books then were not packed together on level shelves as they are now, shoulder to shoulder, like common soldiers; but each stately tome stood forward by itself singly, like an officer. So the broad sides of the ample folios seemed to invite decoration.

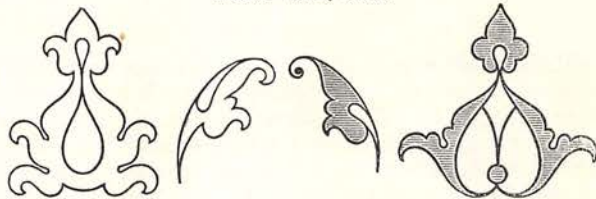
The first books which Grolier had bound in Italy are similar in their style of decoration to those then sent forth from the Aldine press; a few have elegant arabesques, setting off a central shield, but most of them have simple geometrical designs in which interlacing bands, formed by parallel lines gilt-tooled, are relieved by solid ornaments very like those with which the Aldus family then adorned the pages of the books they were printing, and which were suggested some, no doubt, by the illuminations of the old missals, but more, beyond question, by the Oriental traditions of the Greek workmen. The distinguishing quality of these ornaments,

familiar enough to all who know the Aldine style, was grace united to boldness.

Look at a specimen of the earlier of Grolier's bindings. Note the simplicity of the interlaced bands, the sharp strength of the enriching arabesques, the skill with which they are combined; and then remember that this, like every other design, was laboriously tooled bit by bit, and line by line, each separate ornament being stamped on the cover at least twice, once to impress the leather, and again to attach the gold. It is only an understanding of the technic of an art which enables us to appreciate its triumphs. The art of the bookbinder is limited by the "tools" he uses. A "tool," in the parlance of the trade, is the brass implement at the end of which is cut the little device, ornament, or part of an ornament, that is separately to be transferred to the leather. Every figure, every leaf, every branch, every part of the design, is made of one or more tools. The binder conceives his general scheme of decoration, knowing his tools; and it is by a combination and repetition of these tools that he forms his design. One might almost say that tools are style; certainly it is obvious that the tools changed form concurrently with every modification of taste in bookbinding; and a study of the tools, as they have been modified during the past three centuries, is essential to any understanding of the art of bookbinding. Thus we see that when Grolier began to gather his library the binder used tools copied from Aldine typographic devices, and impressed in gold on the cover of a book that figure which on the printed page was a solid black. But the finer taste of the Renaissance soon discovered that, although the broad black of the Aldine devices was pleasing on a



ALDINE TOOLS, SOLID.



ALDINE TOOLS, HOLLOW.

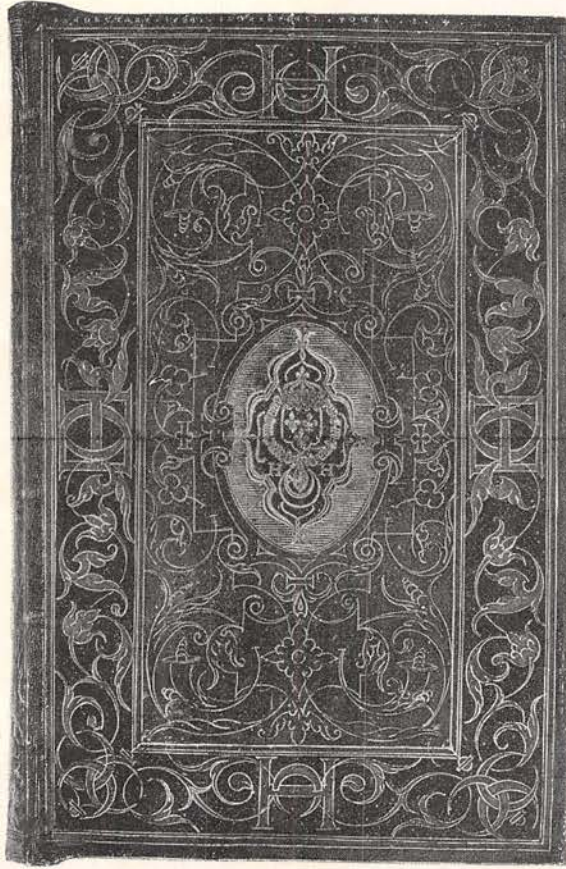
ALDINE TOOLS, AZURED

white page, an excess of solid gold was less satisfactory on the side of a book. So they made these tools sometimes hollowed,—that is, in outline merely, which lightened them

instantly,— and sometimes azured — that is, crossed by horizontal lines, as in the manner of indicating “azure” in heraldry. Then, having the same device in three different values where before they had but one, the adroit binder was able to vary and combine them as he needed solid strength or easy lightness.

The next step was to increase the variety and the complication of the interlacing bands—and it is these interlacing bands which are perhaps the chief characteristic of the Grolier bindings. Instead of being indicated by two fine lines of

On one or the other side of Grolier’s books was the legend “Io. Grolierii et amicorum,” a form which M. Le Roux de Lincy thinks he may have borrowed from his friend Maioli, an Italian collector, of whom almost nothing is known, although his books are greatly sought after—Grolier had several of them. M. Clément de Ris, the author of a pleasant volume on the “Amateurs d’Autrefois,” doubts whether Grolier ever lent his books, despite this altruistic declaration. But M. Le Roux de Lincy has been able to trace not a few duplicates



“PANDECTARUM JURIS FLORENTINI, VOL. II.” BINDING WITH THE ARMS OF FRANCE SURROUNDED WITH SCROLLS, AND WITH THE CIPHER OF HENRY II. AND DIANA OF POITIERS. IN THE MAZARIN LIBRARY. (FROM “LA RELIURE FRANÇAISE,” BY M. MARIUS MICHEL. BY PERMISSION OF DAMASCÈNE MORGAND.)

gold, the bands were marked out by three lines. Finally, the bands traced by plain gold tooling were enriched by paint. Adroitly contrasted colors were chosen to fill up the hollow bands which twisted above and below one another all over the cover of the book. To-day these painted ribbons and the gilding of the design are sadly dulled by the years, but when they were fresh, nothing could have been more magnificently resplendent than this polychromatic decoration.

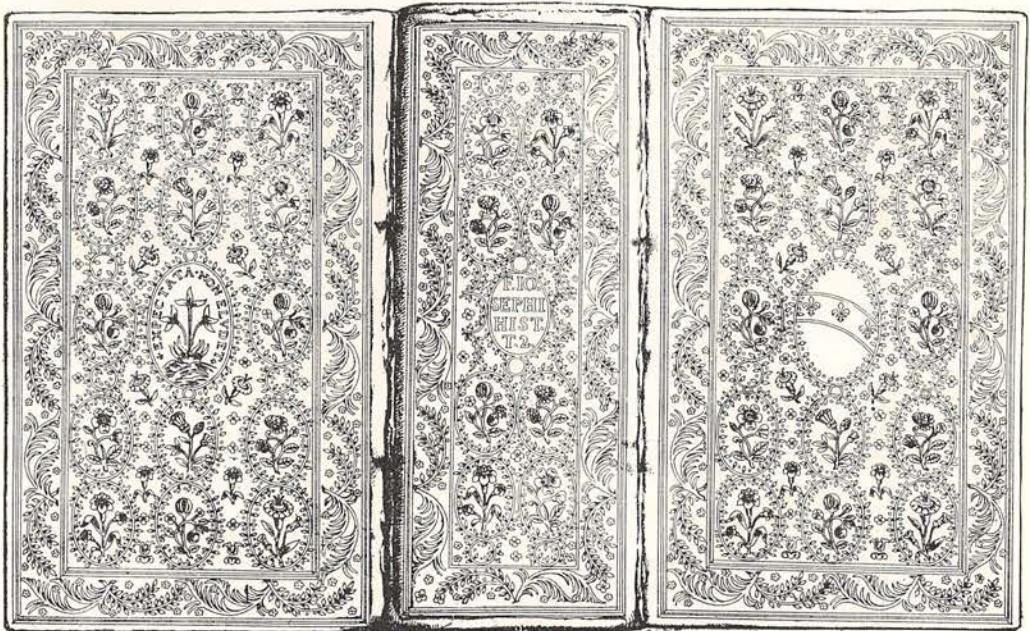
and triplicates from Grolier’s collection,— he has even found five copies of the same Aldine edition of Vergil,—whence it is fair to conclude that the book-lover meant the legend to be interpreted in the most liberal manner, in that he stood ready to give his books to his friends, even though he was not willing to lend them. Indeed, to lend a beloved volume is the last thing a true bibliophile can be coaxed to do, although the lending of books was a form of charity specially recommended by a Council

of Paris so far back as 1212. We know that Grolier gave four of the best of his books to the father of J. A. de Thou.

The books bound for Maioli are almost as beautiful as the books bound for Grolier, but, as M. Marius Michel remarks, Maioli had some poor bindings, and Grolier had none. Perhaps it was also due to the example of Maioli that Grolier chose a motto, which ran, "Portio mea, Domine, sit in terra viventium," modified from Psalm cxli. Maioli's was, "Inimici mea michi, non me michi." Marc Laurin of Watervliet, a friend of Grolier and of Maioli, and a book-lover like them, had for his motto, "Virtus in arduo." In as marked a contrast as may be with the friendly legend on Grolier's books is the motto which the learned Scaliger borrowed from the Vulgate, "Ite ad vendentes"—"Go rather to them that sell" (Matthew xxv. 9).

scrollwork flowing through it"; and the Grolier was said to be "an interlaced framework of geometrical figures, circles, squares, and diamonds, with scrollwork running through it, the ornaments of which are of Moresque character, and often azure." A classification of this sort is lacking in scientific precision, since all three of these styles existed at the same time, and are to be found on books bound for Grolier, although there is no doubt that he most often affected the interlacing geometrical patterns. That three styles different enough to bear distinct names should flourish side by side is evidence, were any needed, of the extraordinary artistic richness of the Italian renaissance.

Nor is this the whole story. While Grolier and his fellow-collectors were developing a French art in Italy, and with Italian workmen, the art was taking root in France, and



Desseignees

BINDING OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY. (FROM "HISTOIRE

Desseignees

DE LA BIBLIOPHILIE." BY PERMISSION OF J. TECHENER.)

PREFIXED to the "Catalogue of an Exhibition of Recent Bookbindings, 1860-1890," held at the Grolier Club in New York in December, 1890, was a note on styles, in which there was a division of the best known work of the Renaissance into three classes rather arbitrarily designated as "Aldine or Italian," "Maioli," and "Grolier." The Aldine was said to have ornaments of solid face without any shading whatever, and these ornaments were of Arabic origin, and such as were used by Aldus and the other early Italian printers; the Maioli was said to be composed generally "of a framework of shields or medallions, with a design of

flourishing lustily. Born in the reign of Louis XII., Grolier died in the reign of Charles IX., and he was a witness of the sturdy development of art in France under Francis I. and Henry II. While he was having books bound in one or another of the three contemporary styles of Italian origin, two styles were in process of evolution in France, without his assistance, and perhaps without his approval. Certainly there is now extant no volume known to have belonged to Grolier decorated either with a *semé* (as the French call it), a "powder," frequently used by Francis I., or with the elaborately enriched central rec-

tangle, surrounded by a frame of rolling arabesques, such as we find Henry II. to have been fond of. In the *semé* there is, perhaps, a lightly tooled fillet around the side of the book, and perhaps a coat of arms, or some other vignette, in the center, and even at each corner, but the binding derives its decorative richness from the sowing broadcast of the king's initial, or of the royal lily, or of some other single tool, repeated regularly in horizontal and perpendicular lines. Sometimes it contains but one device thus repeated geometrically, and sometimes two or three devices are alternated, and agreeably contrasted. In the hands of a feeble binder the "powder" degenerates easily into stiff and barren monotony; but when the devices are adroitly varied, and made to sustain each other skilfully, it is capable of indisputable dignity and strength.

A kindred artful employment of monogram and personal emblem it is which gives distinction to the beautiful bindings which bear the double H of Henry II., and the triple crescent of Diana of Poitiers. The famous Henri Deux ware, for which the lover of ceramic art longs in vain, has not a rarer charm than that of some of the bindings executed at the same time and under the same inspiration. M. Marius Michel, bringing to the study a highly trained understanding of the technic of bibliopégic art, declares that there were in France under Henry II. three, and perhaps four, binders of extraordinary merit. Their work survives to this day, and is more and more admired, but their names have perished forever. It is a pity that we cannot do honor to the memory of the noble craftsman who executed some of the most splendid bindings with no other implements than the

straight fillet and curved gouge, disdaining aid of any engraved tools whatsoever. To him we owe the transcendent folio, "Pandectarum Juris Florentini," now in the Mazarin Library at Paris. M. Marius Michel

asserts that no binder had ever such skill of hand. "As clay is transformed under the fingers of the clever sculptor, so the learned arabesques, the graceful volutes, seemed to be born under his instruments; no one has ever carried to such a degree the exquisite sentiment of form."



CURVED GOUGES.



BINDING EXECUTED BY NICOLAS ÈVE, 1579. (FROM "MANUEL HISTORIQUE ET BIBLIOGRAPHIQUE DE L'AMATEUR DE RELIURE." BY PERMISSION OF LÉON GRUEL.)



A "POWDER" (*SEMÉ*) WITH THE DEVICE OF THE DAUPHIN.

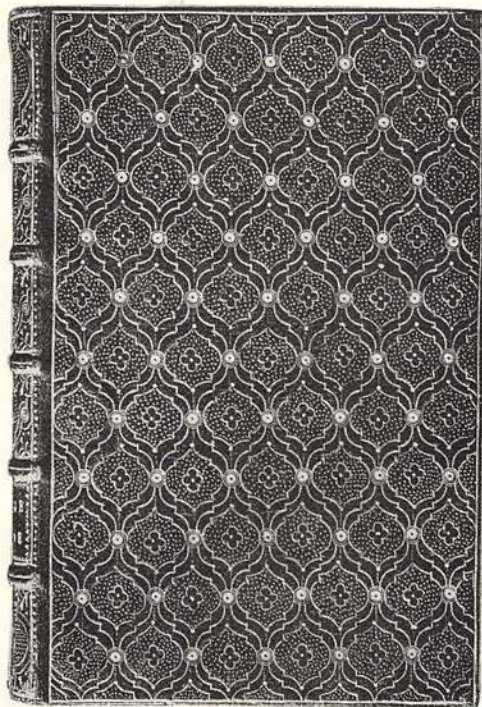
II.

DE THOU AND LE GASCON.

In the history of the bibliopégic art the names of book-lovers and of bookbinders are inextricably entangled. At one moment the dominant individuality is seen to be a collector like Grolier or Mañoli, and at the next it is an artist-artisan like Le Gascon or Derome. After the death of Henry II., the great binders of his reign disappear absolutely; there is no trace of their handiwork or of their tools. Perhaps they were Huguenots, as French historians of the art have surmised, and were done to death, or fled the country, before the promulgation of the Edict of Nantes in 1598.

Whatever their fate, the tradition was broken, and the art of bookbinding developed on other lines than theirs; and the personality which next comes into view is that of a collector—Jacques Auguste de Thou.

When Grolier was in danger of his life De Thou's father saved him, and Grolier gave the elder De Thou four of the best books of his library. The son was then only nine years old, but perhaps this was the beginning of his love for books—a sacred fire which thus passed from Grolierius to Thuanus by a sort of apostolic succession. Born in 1553, De Thou traveled from 1573 to 1582, paying a visit in 1576 to Plantin. In 1593 he was appointed to the custody of the books of the king, Henry IV., succeeding Jacques Amyot, the translator of Plutarch's "Lives," and of the "Daphnis et Chloe" of Longus. In his new post De Thou was able to save for the nation the library of Catherine de' Medici. Swift says that "some know books as they do lords; learn their titles exactly, and then brag of their acquaintance"; and there are always book-collectors of this sort. But De Thou was a book-lover of another kind; he knew his books, he used them well, he lived with them; and to-day he lives



"OFFICE DE LA SEMAINE SAINTE," BOUND BY N. PADELOUP. (FROM "REMARKABLE BINDINGS IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM," BY HENRY B. WHEATLEY.)



"VALERII MAXIMI DICTORUM FACTORUMQUE MEMORABILUM, LIBRI IX." BOUND BY NICOLAS ÈVE. FROM THE LIBRARY OF DE THOU. (FROM "REMARKABLE BINDINGS IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM," BY HENRY B. WHEATLEY.)

by the fame they have given him since he died in 1617. It is the love of books which has saved his name from oblivion, as M. Clément de Ris declares in his pleasant gossip about the "Amateurs d'Autrefois." "Distinguished magistrate, remarkable writer, historian of rare merit, statesman of exceptional common sense and of great foresight, what survives is the bibliophile. Who remembers that he took part in the abjuring of Henry IV., or that he was one of the most active negotiators of the Edict of Nantes? No one. Who reads the 'History of his Time?'—'that grand and faithful history,' as Bossuet called it. Again, no one. But ask any petty dealer in second-hand books what the emblem was with which he marked his books. He will answer you without the error of a letter. A collector, if he have but an elevated taste, is moved by respect for the past; he seeks the driftwood of time, which the present despises. The future pays the debt of the past"—and hands the collector's name down to posterity.

It was toward the end of the reign of Charles IX., after the death of Grolier (1565), that we find the first specimens of a new style. The side of a book was now covered by a framework of small compartments formed by double-filleted bands. At first these compartments were

empty, and Henry III. added to the barren severity of the design by filling the central space with a stamp representing the crucifixion. As Henry II. put the bow and arrows and triple crescents of the unchaste Diana on the royal bindings, so the somber Henry III., taking life sadly because of his lost love, Mary of Cleves, was fond also of a powder of tears and of death's heads scattered through the lilies of France. So solemn a style of decoration did not tempt his sister Margaret of Valois, afterward known as Queen Margot, and she preferred a powder of marguerites, each flower being framed in an oblong wreath.

For her, also, the cold austerity of the geometrically distributed compartments was done away with, and, while the same regular framework was retained, all the hollow spaces within and without the figures, formed by the double fillets, were filled with



THE LITTLE BRANCHES.

twisting branches, with spiral vines, and with a multitude of little tools, light, airy, and graceful. These are the bindings which we find on the best of the books of De Thou. These are the bindings which are credited to the Èves, Nicolas and Clovis, two brothers who were the royal binders from 1578 to 1627. Whether or not they are entitled to the credit for the many beautiful bindings rather rashly attributed to them is one of the many moot points in the history of the art. These are the bindings now known as "fanfares," because that was the chief word in the title of an old book which Thouvenin bound in this style for Charles Nodier, during the Restoration. These are the bindings which served as models to that greatest of binders, who is known to us as Le Gascon, and who, so M. Marius Michel surmises, may have been a pupil or apprentice of the binders who worked for De Thou.

AFTER Grolier, perhaps Le Gascon is the foremost personality in the history of bookbinding. Grolier was not a binder himself; he was a collector, an art-patron, and when applied to him the term has no taint of the offensiveness which may attach to it nowadays; and, as it happens, we do not know the names of any of the artist-artisans who worked for Grolier, and to whom we owe the many masterpieces of the most magnificent collection ever yet attempted. Le

Gascon was himself a binder, but this is all we know about him. We do not know for sure whether or not it was he who covered the immortal "Guirlande de Julie"; we do not even know whether Le Gascon is his patronymic, or a mere nickname. Probably it is a sobriquet recalling his Gascon origin. M. Léon Gruel, in his "Manuel Historique et Bibliographique de l'Amateur de Reliure" (Paris: Gruel & Engelmann. 1887),—one of the most valuable of many volumes the present writer has placed under contribution in the preparation of these pages,—reproduces a binding signed by Florimond Badier (now in the National Library in Paris), and draws attention to the extraordinary resemblance in style which this binding bears to the bindings generally ascribed to Le Gascon. M. Gruel ventured the hypothesis that Florimond Badier might be the real name of the man whose nickname was Le Gascon. But M. Marius Michel, a practical binder himself (as is M. Gruel); in his book about "La Reliure Française" (Paris: Damascène Morgand et Charles Fatout. 1880),—another book to which the writer owes more than he can here confess,—M. Marius Michel had declared this binding of Florimond Badier's to be the handiwork of some clumsy imitator of Le Gascon, who had copied even the dotted outline of a human head which some have taken to be in some sort the trade-mark of the master. Who shall decide when decorators disagree? If a layman may hazard an opinion, it would be to the effect that although Florimond Badier might well be the true name of Le Gascon, yet the binding in question is not equal to the best of those accredited to the supreme artist of biblioegy, those marvels of taste and splendor wherein the utmost luxury of gilding is never allowed to become vulgar, tawdry, or even glaring.

That Le Gascon is the foremost of all the artists who have embellished a book-cover is the verdict of his fellow-craftsmen. M. Gruel does not yield to M. Marius Michel in admiration of the magnificent masterpieces which came from the hands of Le Gascon. In all that M. Marius Michel has written about Le Gascon there is a glow of devoted enthusiasm. Mr. William Matthews is as swift in praise; and Mr. Cobden-Sanderson, when I asked him whom he held to be the greatest of all binders, did not hesitate, but answered promptly and positively, "Le Gascon." As Keats has been called the poets' poet, so is Le Gascon the bookbinders' bookbinder. But it does not need the trained eye of the expert to discover his surpassing charm, the richness of his gilding, and the unflinching delicacy and distinction of his design. Yet the most characteristic of his bindings differs but little from those of his im-

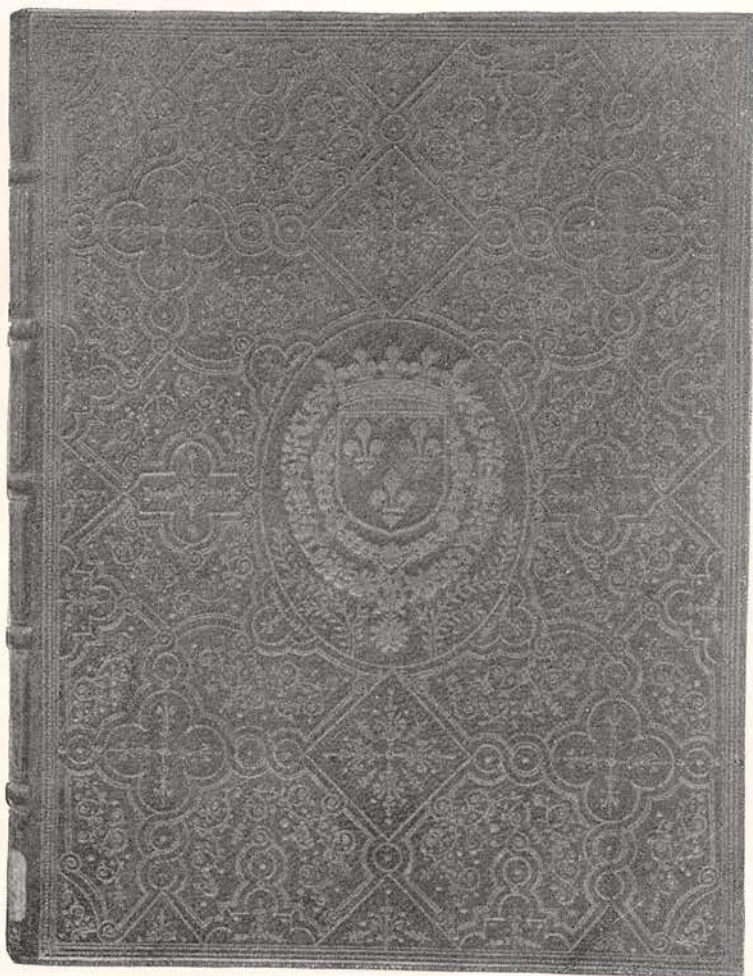


TOOLS USED
IN THE
"FAN-
FARES."

mediate predecessors—in so far at least as the mere structure and outline of the decoration are concerned. It was only by slow degrees that he developed his own individuality, and to the end of his career he employed the formal framework of the fanfares whenever he had to do a binding of exceptional importance.

Now and again, however, he preferred a

placed the simple fillet. The full-face device of the Aldine bindings was first azure, to lighten it a little, and then hollowed out, leaving it in outline only; and now it was made still airier, when it appeared only as a string of tiny gilt points. This dotted line is the characteristic of Le Gascon, and it gives their incomparable brilliancy to the best of his bind-



"ARIANUS, DE VENATIONE." PARIS, 1644. IN QUARTO. (IMPRIMÉS EXPOSITION, NO. 619. PLAT RECTO.)

Bound in the arms of Gaston of Orleans, which is often attributed to the mysterious Le Gascon, but which is Eve's, nevertheless. This piece is curious in this respect, that it marks the transition between the flowered decoration of Eve and the pointed foliages of Le Gascon. (From "Les Reliures d'Art à la Bibliothèque Nationale." By permission of Edouard Rouveyre.)

less complicated design, and he used a lace-like border and a broad rectangular framework, boldly tooled, and almost filled with a dazzling array of coruscating spirals, which set off the red leather of the smaller central space, containing generally the coat-of-arms of the fortunate owner. It was only by degrees that he introduced what was almost his only innovation—tools in which a dotted line re-

placed the simple fillet. But it is merely one of the implements at the command of his skill and taste, and he would be almost as great an artist if he had not happened on this particular improvement.

M. Marius Michel thinks that Le Gascon in his youth must have been familiar with the best bindings in the library of De Thou. In his manhood he worked for Cardinal Mazarin, and it is worthy of note, as a proof of the mas-



TOOLS OF
LE GASCON.

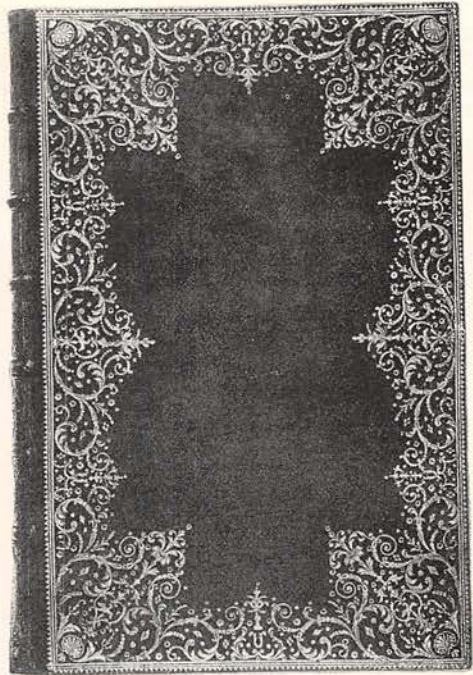
tery of France in an art borrowed from Italy, that when Cardinal Mazarin (himself an Italian) was in Rome in 1643, he sent to Paris for workmen to bind his books. Barely a century and a quarter earlier, Francis I. and Grolier had been forced to import Italian binders into France. Perhaps Le Gascon lent the cardinal some of his own apprentices. That he had assistants is obvious. No one man could satisfy the demands of the book-lovers of his time. M. Marius Michel thinks that he can pick out certain bindings—four volumes of Thomas Aquinas, for example, now in the Mazarin Library—which were the work of these apprentices, as he believes that he can discern in these books the tools of the master, but not his skill of touch. The tools of Le Gascon are graceful in themselves, but to use them as he used them—*ne fait ce tour qui veut*.

III.

PADELOUP AND DEROME.

WHEN Louis XIV. succeeded to the throne of France, and began the long reign which opened in splendor and ended in sadness, probably Le Gascon was still binder to the king; but the influence of the greatest of bibliopegic artists diminished as the years went on, and as the proud king sought to dominate every art, and to center all things in himself as the sun from which all things were to draw light. The reign of Louis XIV. was the golden age of French literature; it was but the over-gilt age of French binding. The characteristic of the art toward the end of the long rule of the Grand Monarch was a brutal luxury of heavy gilding. The king's own books were bound in a fashion as leaden as the architecture of Versailles, and as expressive of the royal pride. The royal arms, exaggerated out of all proportion, were stamped on the center of the side of a book, and they were girt about by a broad border, equally emphatic and equally dull. These borders were often imprinted by a roulette, a wheel on which a pattern was incised in the same way that the cylinder-rings of the Egyptians were engraved. The use of a roulette, repeating the same motive indefinitely as it is rolled over the leather, is indefensible; it is the negation of art; it destroys the free play of hand which is the very essence of handicraft.

The fashion set by the king was copied by



"ARIOSTE, ORLANDO FURIOSO." VENICE, 1584. BINDING OF DEROME THE YOUNGER. EIGHTEENTH CENTURY. (BY PERMISSION OF DAMASCÈNE MORGAND.)

the courtiers, and on most of the books bound under Louis XIV. we find little more than a border around the margin, and a coat-of-arms in the center. Sometimes a roulette was prepared broad enough to imprint a heavy wreath three inches in width; sometimes there would be two or three borders one within the other, the corners forming themselves as best they could, haphazard and happy-go-lucky. Sometimes huge and heavy corner-pieces were employed. Sometimes even the whole side of a book was engraved in the same heavy style, thus reducing the binder's task almost to the level of a day-laborer's. When the public accepts a mechanical and lifeless substitute for artistic and individual handicraft, the result is a deadening of the artistic impulse, and a decadence into the inertia of commonplace.

Possibly we may fairly charge this decline to the inexorable self-assertion of the king; certainly there was no great bookbinder in France while Louis XIV. was on the throne, and no great book-lover. His reign is not distinguished by the development either of a Grolier or of a Le Gascon. Yet it was while he ruled that, under the influence of the traditions



THREE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY BORDERS.

bequeathed by Le Gascon, the tools known to book-lovers as the *fers du dix-septième siècle*, these seventeenth-century tools, were brought into use; and these lovely tools continue in use to this day, and form the basis of the stock in trade of the best binders of the nineteenth century. And in the reign of Louis XIV., also, by sheer reaction against the leaden showiness of the fashion set by the king, there arose the simple style of binding called after Jansen, and adopted by the sect of Port-Royal. The Jansenists bound their books soberly, with no gilding whatsoever on the sides, relying on the simple beauty of the leather in which their volumes were clad, and decorating only the inside border—the “dentelle,” as it was called, from its resemblance to delicate lacework. These under-decorated books were better bound, in a technical sense, than those of an earlier day, however much more beautiful the older books were to the eye. The books bound by Boyet, for example, toward the end of the seventeenth century, were more solidly prepared, more carefully sewn, more cautiously covered, than those sent forth from the workshops of his immediate predecessors. The Boyets, one of whom in 1733 was binder to the king, kept alive the traditions of Le Gascon; and although they were not encouraged and sustained in their more artistic endeavors, as their indisputable skill deserved, yet they are the bridge from the days of Le Gascon to those of the Padeloups and the Deromes.

Shortly after the death of Louis XIV. was produced one of the most remarkable bindings in the history of the art—the “Daphnis et Chloe” of 1715, which is adorned with the arms of the regent, and which was recently in the Quentin-Bauchard collection. Its chief characteristic is that it is a mosaic—that it has a polychromatic decoration formed by inlaid leathers of various colors. The colored bindings of Grolier’s time owed their varied tints to bands of paint, and although there had been now and again attempts at inlaying, there had been no such bold effort as this “Daphnis et Chloe,” attributed generally to Nicolas Padeloup, one of a long family of binders, existing for more than a century and a half. A binding in mosaic of the regency, or of Louis XV., is generally credited to Padeloup, just as a picture with a white horse is often ascribed to Wouwerman without further warrant. The decoration of the “Daphnis et Chloe” was obviously inspired by the designs of the contemporary potters.

And here occasion serves to say that the interdependence of all the decorative arts, their varying influence one upon the other, can be seen in the history of bookbinding, perhaps, more clearly than anywhere else. The modern

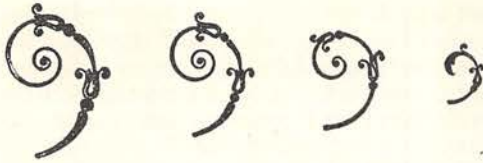
art of bookbinding began boldly in the fifteenth century in Venice, which had close relations with the Orient, and to which many Greek and Arab workmen had been attracted, bringing with them their theories and habits of decoration. Geometric designs of Arabic origin are abundant on all the objects made by Venetian handicraftsmen at this time, especially on the fragile glassware for which the city of islands is still famous; and M. Marius Michel reproduced a decorative band taken from the tiles which adorned the interior of a mosque in Constantinople, and applied also the Venetian embroideries, then given as a model in a volume of Andrea Guadagnino, promptly copied by the Italian bookbinders, and soon borrowed by their French brethren.

At first, very naturally, the decoration of the outside of books was influenced by the decoration of their insides, and we find bindings the design of which was obviously suggested by the rich and lavish embellishment of medieval manuscripts, and others adorned with patterns modified but slightly from the elaborate typographic ornaments of the early printers. The Aldi were binders as well as printers, and the same devices decorated their noble folios both within and without. Geoffroy Tory, the author of “Champ Fleury,” who reformed the art of type-founding and brought about the abandonment of black-letter, was a printer who was also a binder. He is supposed to have worked for his contemporary, Grolier. Mr. Story makes Raphael declare:

It seems to me
All arts are one—all branches on one tree,
All fingers, as it were, upon one hand.

The solidarity of the decorative arts, at least, is indisputable. Even the casual observer cannot but note the hints of design borrowed and lent, and paid back with interest, and borrowed again. Under Louis XIII., for example, when lace-making flourished, the bookbinders took over not a few of the lace-makers’ designs, modifying them to suit the conditions of the bibliopegic art. Perhaps it is not fanciful to see something of the formal grace of the stately gardens of Le Nôtre reflected in the covers of the sumptuous tomes of Louis XIV., influenced for the worse, as these were, by the heavy hand of Lebrun.

As we turn the pages of M. Marius Michel’s instructive and interesting essay, we note that Le Gascon used tools one design of which was suggested by contemporary embroideries; that Padeloup, with a duller sense of fitness, found models in ecclesiastical stained-glass; and that Derome was influenced by the remarkably varied and skilful work of the master iron-workers of the day.



The close interaction of the decorative arts is made obvious again when we find experts like M. Marius Michel seeking for the source of certain of the florid designs attributed to Padeloup in the painted pottery of the regency, and in the symmetrically disposed parterres of the great gardens of Louis XIV. and Louis XV. Perhaps the mosaics of Padeloup (or at any rate the turning of his attention to mosaic) are due to the example of Boule, who died only in 1732, and who carried to the highest perfection the art of incrusting in wood designs of gold and of brass, of shell and of ivory.

The main defect of Padeloup was an insufficient sense of form. Some of these floral designs in mosaic are as unrelated to the shape of the book they decorate as though they had been cut out of an embroidered silk or a printed calico. Some of them have a monotonous repetition of the same framework, as though they were torn from a roll of wall-paper. Form and symmetry, composition and balance—these are essentials of decorative art. Most of Padeloup's designs are fragmentary; they lack unity of motive; they have no center to which the rest of the decoration is duly subordinate. Some of them, less pretentious than others, have a quality of their own. Beyond all question they are characteristic of their period. In the main they are heavy, and they lack skill, style, grace. Style they lack most plentifully, for Padeloup was as eclectic as a quack-doctor. He would mingle in the cover of any one unfortunate book tools and methods borrowed from the whole history of the art.

I confess to having fallen into a popular error here, in speaking of Padeloup as though he were a single entity, despite the fact that there were, first and last, twelve of the Padeloups. And of the Derome dynasty, which for a while was contemporaneous, there were no less than



EIGHTEENTH CENTURY TOOLS.

fourteen who were more or less known as binders. Perhaps the greatest of these was Nicolas Denis Derome, who was received master in 1761, and who is generally known as the Younger Derome. The Younger Derome was a rapid binder, a merit most rare in those who practise this craft; and he was an honest workman, loyally following the mandates of his customers. His bindings have solidity and substance. But he was too fond of the knife, and, like a cruel surgeon, too careless in its use. He cut to the quick, and many a beautiful book has died under his treatment. Margins and edges were shorn away with merciless persistence; no tall copies ever left his shop. Dibdin cries out against Derome again and again, and we cannot but feel that the cutting-iron of the binder had pierced the soul of that traveling book-lover. The Englishman declares that a folio of "Priscianus," printed by John of Spire in 1470, had lost a head and shoulders, and that a good half of the miniatures are cut into at the top. This is a crime for which the guillotine itself is the only fit punishment.

As it is the custom to attribute to Padeloup all the mosaics of the period, so to Derome are credited



A DEROME BORDER.

all the bindings whereon we see the *fer à l'oiseau*, a gracefully cut tool wherein a tiny bird with outstretched wings gives life and vivacity to the decoration of the book. In Derome's hands this decoration consisted generally of a dentelle, a lacework border obviously modeled on the marvelously easy and varied wrought-iron of the French smiths of the middle of the eighteenth century. Nothing could be at once lighter and firmer, and of its kind more charming, than the best of the open-work borders of Derome, solidly tooled on broad morocco. And the motives, borrowed from the artist-artisans who were forging the gates and making the locks of the French connoisseurs of that century, are capable of infinite variation. Probably there are no two bindings of Derome's exactly alike.

I confess that I have here praised Derome more warmly than do the French critics at whose feet I sit, and whose learned taste I envy. Derome's work seems to me to be preferable at all points to Padeloup's; easier, more graceful, more appropriate—in a word, more decorative. After Padeloup and Derome the eighteenth century had no binder in France over whose work we need dwell now. The art was getting clumsy and sluggish. Strangely enough, the vignettists, even at the height of their vogue, did not inspire those who decorated the outsides of the volumes, the insides of which they had illustrated with such dainty and delicious fantasy. Eisen was a friend of a

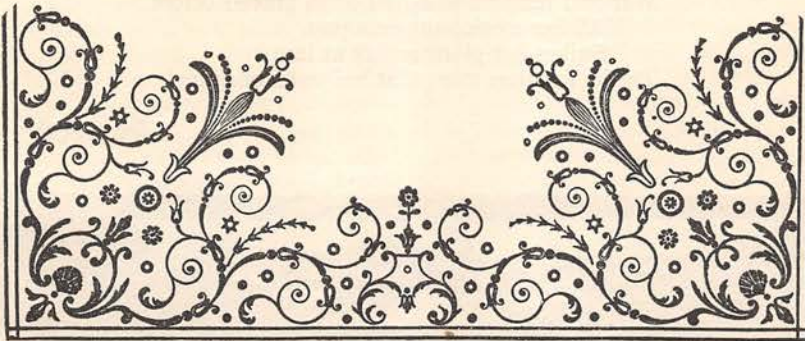
binder named Dubuisson, but the friendship had no appreciable effect upon Dubuisson's handiwork. Gravelot designed the tools to be used on the sides and back of the volumes of his "Contes" of La Fontaine (1762), of his Racine (1768), and of his Corneille (1771); but his hand seems to have lost somewhat of its cunning when it undertook a task for which it had no training. At least so M. Marius Michel thinks, and his is a trained taste which a layman may wisely follow. Cochin did not suggest a chaste disorder to those who bound the books he had adorned with his delicate plates; nor did Moreau—and if a French decorative artist of the last century could not be stimulated by Moreau, then the effort was hopeless.

It is not a treatise on bookbinding that I have here attempted, or a history of the art, or even a set and formal essay. All I have sought to do is to jot down a few stray notes—to gossip about those who have helped to make the Book Beautiful. What I have tried to show in my rambling paragraphs, and in the illustrations chosen to accompany them, is the sequence of styles, and the way one style was evolved from another, and their relations one to the other. At first we find almost simultaneously the Aldine and the Maïoli, the Grolier and the Henry II., styles. Then followed the *semé* (which probably suggested the wreaths), the fanfares of the *Èves*, and the brilliant fantasies of Le Gascon. Finally came Padeloup with his polychromatic mosaics (some of them deriving their monotonous framework from the wreaths and the *semé*), and Derome with his vigorous borders. And as I wandered down the history of bookbinding, I have tried to show that the key to any understanding of the succeeding styles is to be found in a study of the tools of each epoch.

That the names of the gifted bookbinders

and devoted book-lovers which came to the end of my pen in the course of my stroll down the vista of bibliopegy were nearly all French is not wilful on my part, but inevitable. The art of bookbinding was cradled in France, even if it was born elsewhere, and in France it grew to maturity. Italy shared the struggle with France in the beginning, but soon fell behind exhausted. Germany invented the book-plate to paste inside a volume, in default of the skill so to adorn the volume externally that no man should doubt its ownership. England has had but one binder—Roger Payne—that even the insular enthusiasm of his compatriots would dare to set beside the galaxy of bibliopagic stars of France. The supremacy of the French in the history of this art is shown in the catalogues of every great book sale and of every great library; the gems of the collection are sure to be the work of one or another of the Frenchmen to whose unrivaled attainments I have once more called attention in these pages. It is revealed yet again by a comparison of the illustrations in the many historical accounts of the art, French and German, British and American; nearly nine tenths of the bindings chosen for reproduction are French. And, after enjoying these, we are often led to wonder why a misplaced patriotism was blind enough to expose the other tenth to a damaging comparison. These remarks, of course, apply only to the binders whose work was done before the beginning of the nineteenth century. Of late years the superiority of French binders has been undisputable, but it has not been overwhelming. There are at present in Great Britain and in the United States binders whom no one has a right to pass over in silence, and about whom I hope to be allowed to gossip again in these pages; but in the past it was France first and the rest nowhere.

Brander Matthews.



A DEROME BORDER.