

## BOOKBINDINGS OF THE PRESENT.

### NOTES OF A BOOK-LOVER.

#### I.

**A**S there is unfortunately no word in the English language to describe those familiar, yet elevated, poems which in France are known as *vers de société*, and which are far above ordinary "society verse," and as there is no single term to denote the short story, the form of fiction in which we Americans have been most abundant and successful, so also is there need in English of a recognized phrase for defining each of the two halves of bibliopegic art. Bookbinding consists of two wholly distinct operations, known to the expert as "forwarding" and "finishing." Forwarding is the proper preparation of a book for its cover and the putting on of that cover; finishing is the decoration of the sides and back of the book after it has been covered. Forwarding, therefore, is the task of an artisan, while finishing must be the work of an artist.

Mr. William Matthews, than whom there is no one more competent to express an opinion, has declared that "a book, when neatly and cleanly covered, is in a very satisfactory condition without any finishing or decorating." Many book-lovers agree with the foremost of American bookbinders, and order their precious volumes to be soberly clad in plain morocco. The Jansenist binding, as it is called after the leader of the recluses of Port Royal, calls for the maximum of care in the forwarding, and the minimum of gilding or other decoration of the finisher. Mr. Matthews went even further,—I quote from his lecture on "Bookbinding Practically Considered," delivered before the Grolier Club of New York in 1885, and by the club printed in 1889,—and having described the successive steps by which a book is prepared, forwarded, and covered with leather, said: "I now declare the book in this condition is bound, and he who has skilfully mastered these various processes through which a volume has passed deserves the name of binder; he who is called upon to decorate it, finisher. At present the custom is the reverse: the finisher or decorator is credited with being the binder, whereas he has done none of the binding."

Now, there is no doubt that the complaint

of this accomplished craftsman is well founded. But the error is so old that there is no hope of uprooting it at this late day. When we speak of a book as beautifully bound, we are praising the work of the man who designed and executed the decoration of the cover, not the labor of the man who clothes the book with leather, and who obviously enough is really its binder. Of course, in a great many instances forwarder and finisher are one and the same person. Perhaps this was the case with the books which are catalogued as "bound by Le Gascon," although it is as a finisher that Le Gascon is unrivaled, and certainly it is the case with the books bound by Mr. Cobden-Sanderson, who himself attends to every detail of preparing and forwarding, aided only by his wife. The French term for "finisher" is "gilder," and, in his account of French bookbinding, M. Marius Michel, a *doreur* himself, is very careful to give credit for a delicate decoration to the special artist who designed and gilded it. It is greatly to be regretted that there is in popular use only one word to designate the two distinct operations.

Although these notes on the art of bookbinding as it is practised to-day have to do with the work of the finisher—the artist who adorns the exterior of a volume, and not with the more humble, but not less important, labor of the forwarder—the artisan who prepares it for decoration, it may not be amiss to begin by setting forth the series of operations a book undergoes at the hands first of the forwarder, and then of the finisher; and in this explanation of technical processes I shall follow two masters of the bibliopegic art, Mr. William Matthews, from whose lecture before the Grolier Club I have already quoted, and Mr. Joseph W. Zaehnsdorf, whose handbook of "The Art of Bookbinding" came forth in a second edition in 1890. Every book-lover should understand the principles of the art of the bookbinder, and the practices of the craft; appreciation is best founded on knowledge.

Often a volume comes into the hands of the binder already bound. The books of American publishers are issued in substantial cloth covers intended to be permanent. The bindings of British publishers are frequently more temporary, and the book is merely cased in the cloth cover,

the owner being expected to rebind in leather any volume which he deems worthy of preservation. The books of French publishers are issued in paper covers, merely stitched, and so are most of those of the German publishers; as Lord Houghton recorded on one of his early visits, "In Germany all the books are in sheets and all the beds without." The first thing the binder has to do if the book is already bound is to remove this cover, and then carefully to collate the volume page by page, to see if title, preface, table of contents, list of illustrations, notes, index, maps, plates, are each and all perfect and in place. If need be, the sheets are refolded so as to make the pages true; then they are beaten by hand, or rolled in a press, which is a more hurried method, and by far less workmanlike; the beating being to compact the pages, and to give the book solidity and strength. After the beating, the loose maps and illustrations, mounted on linen guards, are inserted in their proper places. Then the sheets are sewn to the bands, and generally there should be no saw-cuts in the back of the book, and the sewing should not be "sunk-band," as it is called, but "raised-band," and as flexible as it is firm.

The volume is now prepared for the forwarder, who carries on the work to the point where it is ready for the finisher. The forwarder attaches the end-papers; he glues the back of the book, and rounds it; he squares the mill boards which are to serve as the sides of the book, and he laces them in by means of the bands to which the sheets have been sewn. The forwarder needs a steady hand, and, above all things, a true eye—"the important principle to be observed in forwarding is *trueness*. The form and shape of the book depends on the forwarder" (Matthews, p. 35). The volume thus far advanced is clamped in a press, and allowed to repose and gain strength. Then the edges are cut, or at least the top edge is cut, the other margins being better left intact, to delight the owner's eye; as it is only on top that a volume standing on a shelf can accumulate dust, it is only the top edge that needs to be smoothed so that the dust can be blown off or wiped away at will. The cut edges, be it the top only, or top, bottom, and fore edge, are then marbled or gilded; sometimes they are gilded over marbling, to the added richness of the work. The back is then lined, and, when the binder is conscientious, a narrow leather joint is affixed, to act as a hinge for the covers. The headband is woven in. After that the leather—morocco, calf, or what not—is stretched tightly and snugly over the book, and glued fast. When the end-papers are pasted to the covers, the task of the forwarder is done, and the book is ready for the finisher who is to decorate it.

What the finisher has to do is to invent a design for the sides and back of the volume which is appropriate to the book, to its subject, to its owner, to its size, and to the kind of leather with which it is covered. This design must be one which can be worked out with the implements at his command. Every artist must consider the physical limitations of the art he practises, and the chief limitation of the artist who decorates a book is that the design he invents for it must be capable of accomplishment by the fillets, which make a straight line, by the gouges, which make curved lines, and by the various other tools, as they are termed. In the proper cutting and selection of tools is the secret of book-decoration. Mr. Matthews notes the superiority of the French tool-cutters over the American and English, and Mr. Cobden-Sanderson once told me of the difficulty he has had in getting cut such tools as he needed.

Having determined on the scheme of his design, the finisher selects the tools with which to execute it. Mr. Cobden-Sanderson even makes a habit of using the actual tools in the sketching out of his pattern, blackening them in the flame of a candle so that they can be transferred to paper. Often professional binders will have tools especially prepared for a special work. The more accomplished the workman, the smaller and more elementary his tools will be; he will decline to use a spray of leaves or a festoon cut all in a single piece, preferring to impress every leaf separately. M. Marius Michel is loud in the praises of a finisher who worked for Henry II., and who accomplished intricate and lovely decorations with no other implement than a fillet for the straight lines, and a set of gouges for the curves and circles; and these were all that Gilson used in the finishing of the most elaborate Hispano-Moresque cover and lining of the copy of Owen Jones's "Alhambra," which Mr. Matthews bound for the New York exhibition of 1853, and which took six months to complete, and cost \$500.

The process of working a design in the best manner is very tedious, so Mr. Matthews testifies, "more so than even connoisseurs imagine. First the design is made on paper, then impressed with the tools through the paper on to the leather; then the paper is removed, and the design again gone over with the tools to make the impression sharp and clear"—the leather being slightly moistened and the tools being moderately heated. "Then, after washing, sizing, and laying on the gold leaf, the design is gone over for the fourth time before one side of the cover is completed. This, having to be repeated on the other side of the volume, and the back also tooled, will afford some idea of the labor in executing the finest hand-tooling." Often the inside of the covers is also lined with

leather, and as carefully ornamented. Often certain figures in the pattern are excised, and the spaces filled with leathers of a different color; and this polychromatic decoration is known as inlaying, or illuminating. The finisher needs to have delicacy of taste and nicety of touch; he must have a fancy to invent beautiful designs, and a firm hand to execute them; and he must not expect wide fame, much real appreciation, or high pay. It is no wonder, therefore, that accomplished finishers are very few. Mr. Quaritch, in his catalogue of bookbindings, speaks of the late Francis Bedford as the best binder who ever lived. The best forwarder, he may have been, but he was not a finisher himself, and he never had a first-class finisher in his employ. Mr. Matthews asserted that there were not more than six finishers in New York "who can even work any intricate pattern with fair ability. In London I question if the number is greater in proportion to the population; and in Paris, where the art flourishes most, where the patronage is encouraging, and the workmen have superior advantages, I doubt if the number of finishers qualified to work intricate designs in first-class manner exceeds twenty."

Any one who was fortunate enough to see the Exhibition of Recent Bookbindings, 1860-1880, at the Grolier Club in the last days of 1890, or who will take the trouble to turn the pages of M. Octave Uzanne's "*La Reliure Moderne*," must confess that there are very few finishers of our time who have originality of invention, freshness of composition, or individuality of taste. But a comparison of the best-bound books of this century with those of the seventeenth and sixteenth centuries — which are the golden ages of bibliopegy, for Le Gascon lived in one, and Grolier in the other — will show that the work of our time is technically far better than any which has come down to us from our ancestors. There is better forwarding and better finishing. In the gold-tooling especially the modern workman is incomparably neater, cleaner, more exact, more conscientious, than his predecessor: the tooling of the men who bound for Grolier is to our eye inexcusably careless; clumsy irregularities mar the symmetry of the most beautifully designed arabesques, ill-balanced lines overrun their limits, and ends are left hanging out with reckless slovenliness. The superiority of the elder binders in their incomparable fertility of conception must not blind us to the fact that in care, in thoroughness, and in other workmanlike qualities, they bear a most obvious inferiority to binders of later years who have not a tithe of their ability.

Probably the same state of affairs exists in other arts. I remember that in 1867, when I

was but a boy, I had a chat in Naples with Signor Castellani, the antiquary and goldsmith, about the fluctuations of the art of the silver-smith. He told me that he had more than one workman then in his shop of greater skill than Benvenuto Cellini, of a more certain handicraft. These workmen could reproduce any of Cellini's legacies to posterity, little masterpieces of goldsmithery and enameling, and they would make a better job of it than the great Italian; for the modern imitations would show a finer technical skill than Cellini's, and reveal fewer defects and blunders and accidents than the marvelous originals. But copy as accurately as they might, the modern workmen were wholly incapable of originating anything. In Cellini there was a union of the head and the hand, of the artist and of the artisan, while in Castellani's men the hand had gained skill, but the head had lost its force. The handicraft had improved, and the art had declined. There were now very expert artisans, but there was no indisputably gifted artist.

In solidity of workmanship and in dexterity of handicraft, the art of the binder has advanced in this century; but not in design. The finishers of our time can repeat all the great artists of the past, but they cannot rival them in invention, in fantasy, in freshness, and in charm. To say this is not to assert that the art is in its cadence, or even that it is in any way going backward; but that it is not going forward one might venture to hint. The nineteenth century is now in its last decade, and it has not yet developed a style of its own in bookbinding — if it has in any other of the decorative arts. The men who bound for Grolier and Henry II. lived in the sixteenth century; the Èves and Le Gascon lived in the seventeenth; and even in the eighteenth century there was Derome, with his lace-work borders borrowed from, or at least inspired by, the graceful wrought-iron work of the contemporary French smiths. But the most beautiful bindings of the nineteenth century are in the main imitations of those of the centuries preceding. Often the style is a doubtful and tasteless eclectic, perhaps not unfairly to be stigmatized as bastard and mongrel. There is hardly to be detected even a vague effort after a style. Sometimes imitation develops into adaptation, and a new style is evolved slowly out of combinations and modifications, but in the art of binding we have not seen many signs of any such process now going on. Almost the only external influence which has been allowed to affect the accepted formulas is the Japanese, and the example of these surpassingly adroit decorative artists has not been sufficient to destroy the sterility from which the art of bookbinding is suffering. Its effect, at most, has been to increase the freedom of drawing, and

to encourage a more realistic treatment of natural objects.

The art of bookbinding has always been claimed by the French as peculiarly theirs, and it is not easy to deny the justice of the demand. Perhaps the position in which the art has found itself during the most of this century is due to the French Revolution, in the course of which, and of the long wars that ensued, the demand for fine work ceased abruptly. The trained workmen died off, the shops were broken up, and the tools were scattered and lost. Even the traditions of the art disappeared — and in every art which is also a trade the traditions represent the acquired force, the impetus. When the Empire came after the Consulate, and Napoleon wished to pose as the patron of the arts, bookbinding was dead in France. "I doubt if you could find anything more ugly than the books bound for Napoleon I., for Louis XVIII., for Louis Philippe," declared M. Auguste Laugel, in a letter to the "Nation," a dozen years or so ago.

As it happened, the art which had been highest in France, and had now sunk lowest, had kept its humble level in England, and at the end of the last century had even had its only successful effort at originality there. The greatest name in the history of bookbinding in Great Britain is that of Roger Payne, an honest and thorough workman of some taste, and with a certain elementary appreciation of design. "His efforts were always original, never copied," and this is a very rare compliment to pay to a British bookbinder; and it is to this originality, as Mr. Matthews suggests, rather than to any great excellence in his designs, that he owes the exaggerated esteem in which he is held in England. When Matthew Arnold once said to Sainte-Beuve that he did not think Lamartine very important as a poet, the French critic replied, "He is important to us"; and so it is with Roger Payne—he is important to the British. If he is mentioned at all in French books, his name is usually given incorrectly.

Lewis was the leading English binder early in this century, in Dr. Dibdin's day. Perhaps it was owing to the influence of Dibdin, some of whose rhapsodical writing was translated into French, that the Parisian book-lovers began to send their precious volumes across the Channel to be bound in London. Thus the tradition of Roger Payne, the most original binder the British had ever had, helped to revive the traditions of the French binders, who soon surpassed again their British rivals, just as it was a follower of Bewick who revealed to the French the possibilities of the art of wood-engraving, in which the French have also become superior to the British.

## II.

WHETHER the vivifying spark was borrowed from Great Britain, or whether it was brought from Germany by Trautz, the French binders soon recovered their former supremacy. Trautz is still the strongest individuality among the French bookbinders of this century, and his influence is still perceptible, though he died in 1879. He is the foremost binder of the nineteenth century, and in his influence we can perhaps detect the foundation of a school, or at least of something more than merely individual, solitary, unaided struggle toward the unknown. At once forwarder and finisher, overseeing every operation of his craft, Trautz led the reform of bookbinding in France. He frowned upon all haste and on all labor-saving devices. He never stinted time or care or hard work. He did his best always. He gave to the volumes which left his hands greater firmness, flexibility, and solidity than any other binder had ever before attempted. He caused a host of new tools to be cut, modeled on those of Le Gascon and Derome and Padeloup. He studied the works of these masters reverently and unceasingly, seeking to spy out the secrets of their art. He followed in their footsteps, but although he modeled himself upon them, he never copied, trying rather to imbue himself with their spirit, and to carry forward their methods to a finer perfection.

"I do not think that Trautz ever made the same binding twice; there is on every book coming out of his hands something personal, something original," M. Laugel wrote in 1879. "This man, who could make any amount of money by merely putting his name on books, is so conscientious that he only turns out every year about two hundred volumes; he has only three workmen or workwomen; he does the drawing of ornaments and gilding himself. For those who have not seen Trautz or Thibaron (the pupil of Trautz) at work, it is almost impossible to imagine how much pains must be taken for one volume." Nothing that Trautz undertook cost more pains than his mosaics; in the two-score years from 1838 to 1878 he attempted only twenty-two of them, and of these four are now owned by New York collectors. They show, perhaps, the most originality of any of his bindings, and they reveal his characteristics most abundantly. They have the pure beauty of design which we look for in every work of decorative art, wrought with the utmost deftness and delicacy of handicraft.

Of the supremacy of the French in the art of bookbinding since Trautz led them back into the true path, no better evidence can there be than the index of binders represented prefixed to the catalogue of the Grolier Club Exhi-

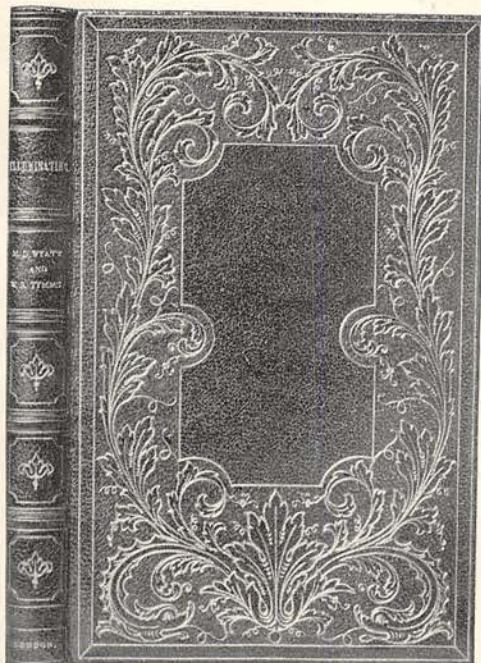
bition of Recent Bookbindings. New York is perhaps the most cosmopolitan of all the great cities of the nineteenth century, especially in all matters pertaining to art; and the taste of its collectors is eclectic in the best sense of that much-abused term. Of the fifty-one binders whose handiwork was exhibited at the Grolier, thirty-six lived in Paris, one at Lyons, one at Brussels, six in London, five in New York, one in Philadelphia, and one in Quebec. The artistic superiority of the French bindings shown at the Grolier was almost as marked as the numerical; of the score of bindings finest in conception and in execution, three fourths at least were the product of Parisian workshops. There were not a few also which had come from these same shops, which were as bad as the worst which had been turned out in New York or London — misbegotten horrors of leather, "whom Satan hath bound," if it is permissible to borrow a scriptural quotation from that learned book-lover, the late Henry Stevens of Vermont.

But the very best of MM. Capé, Cuzin, Chambolle-Duru, De Samblancx, Gruel and Engelman, Joly, Lortic, Marius Michel, Niedrée, Quinet, and Ruban, attains a very high standard of excellence. Now and again, no doubt, we find a French binder who has sacrificed forwarding to finishing, having made his book so solid and so stiff that it can scarcely be opened, and so compacted that if it is opened unwarily the back is broken beyond repair. Books I have seen fresh from the hands of a Parisian binder as brilliant as a jewel-casket, and as hard to open as a safe-deposit vault when you have forgotten the combination.

The relatively high position held by the binders of Great Britain was momentary only, and at best it was due to the temporary decadence of the craft in France. Of late years, at least, bookbinding has shared the misfortune of most of the other fine arts in England, and has lingered in a condition only less lamentable than that of sculpture and painting because it con-

tented itself chiefly with dull and honest imitation of the dead-and-gone masters. Every artist must needs serve his apprenticeship, and follow in the footsteps of a teacher, but where Trautz, for example, sought inspiration only, Bedford and the other British binders found models which they copied slavishly. The workmanship of the bindings that left their shops was honest and thorough, but the decoration was lifeless and colorless. The British artisan forwarded conscientiously, but the finishing of the British artist was sadly to seek.

How inert the art of bookbinding was in England during nearly four-score years can be seen by glancing over the "Catalogue of Fifteen Hundred Books remarkable for the Beauty or the Age of their Bindings" issued by Mr. Quaritch in 1888. Here the curious inquirer will find, under numbers 1325-1345, a score of books bound by Francis Bedford, whom Mr. Quaritch declares to be the best binder who ever lived—meaning thereby, no doubt, the best forwarder; and every one of these books is finished in imitation of some French binder. Nos. 1325 and 1326 are "bound in imitation of Derome le jeune," the catalogue declares frankly, in apparent



HISTORY, THEORY AND PRACTICE OF ILLUMINATING. WYATT DIGBY. LONDON, 1861.

Bound by Zaehnsdorf. Crimson morocco, wide borders, inlaid with variegated leathers in a scroll pattern, bold in design; lined with dark green morocco with red border, the whole ornamented with vines and flowers. Owned by Mr. Samuel P. Avery.

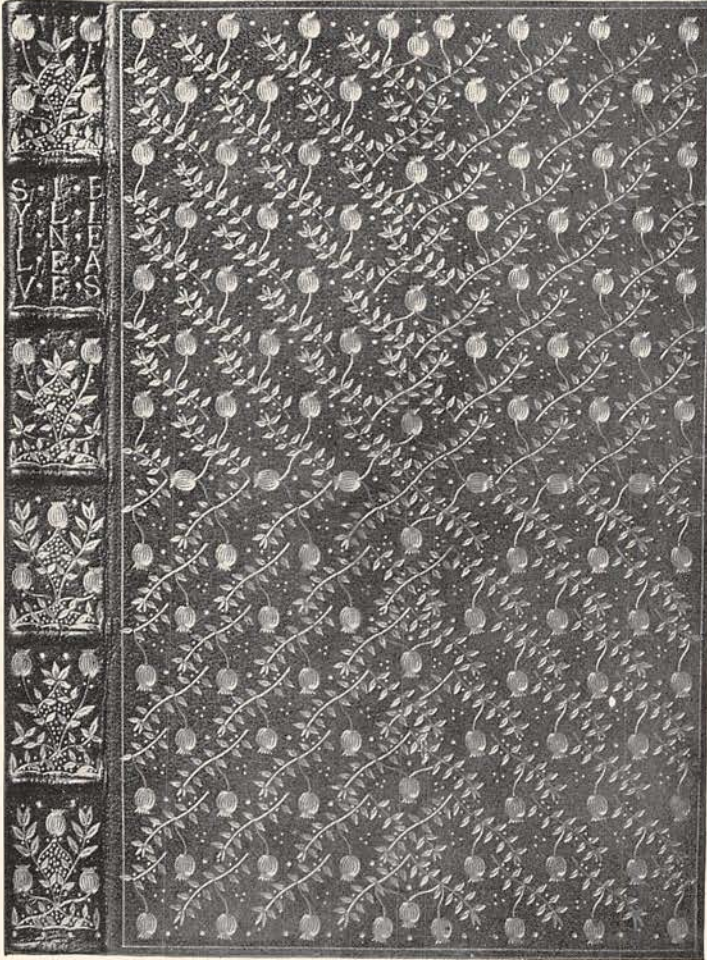
unconsciousness of the hopelessly inartistic position to which this confession assigns the British craftsman. No. 1327 is "in imitation of Padeloup." No. 1328 is "bound in imitation of the work of Hardy-Dumesnil," a French binder not of the highest esteem among book-lovers. Nos. 1329, 1331, 1336, and 1339 are copied from Trautz. Nos. 1334, 1335, and 1345 are "bound in imitation of Chambolle-Duru."

This artistic sterility was probably due to the lack of intelligent patronage, and the sluggishness of the British book-lover is responsible for this disheartening result. But the custom seems to obtain even in the present day, if one may accept as evidence the second edition of Mr. Zaehnsdorf's "The Art of Bookbinding." In this practical guide to his art, the author, a bookbinder himself and the son of a bookbinder,

gives plates of typical covers of the chief styles; and these are not genuine specimens bound for Grolier or by Le Gascon. They are apparently Mr. Zaehnsdorf's own handiwork; certainly the plate called "Gascon" (*sic*) cannot be the work of the great Frenchman, because the book is one first published perhaps two hundred years after his death. Here we discover a conscientious

is another British binder whose labors are liked by book-lovers. The most original figure among the English binders of this century—in fact, the only original figure since Roger Payne—is Mr. Cobden-Sanderson.

Mr. Cobden-Sanderson is one of the most characteristic personalities in the strange struggle for artistic freedom now going on in Eng-



"SIBYLLE LEAVES." S. T. COLERIDGE. LONDON, 1817.

Bound by Cobden-Sanderson. Light olive morocco. Goffered edges of same pattern. Owned by Mr. Samuel P. Avery.

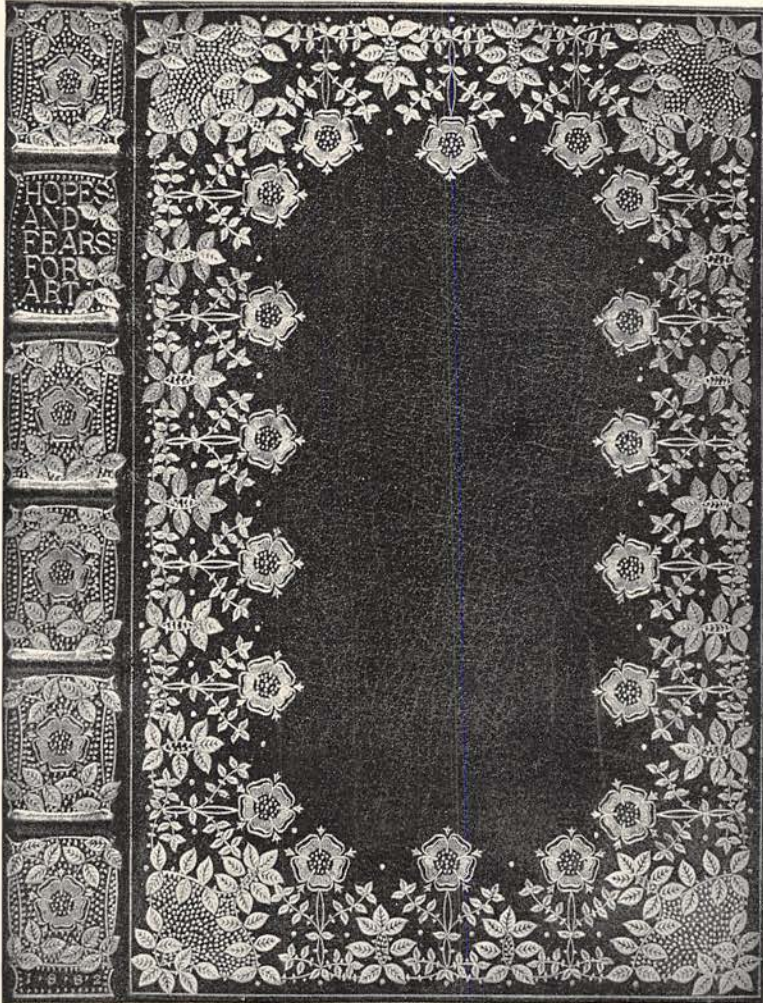
craftsman not only content to be a humble imitator, but so deficient in any appreciation of originality that he sees no difference between the model of his master and his own second-hand copy.

And yet Francis Bedford was capable of original work, simple always, but with a quiet dignity of its own. Mr. Zaehnsdorf is an accomplished workman, able to send from his shop books dressed with propriety, and, at times, not without individuality. Mr. Roger de Coverley

land. He is a friend and fellow-laborer of Mr. William Morris and of Mr. Walter Crane, with whose socialistic propaganda he is in sympathy, and with whom he manifests and parades. He takes much the same view of life that they have; he holds the same creed as to society, and as to each man's duty toward it; he has the same aim in art; and he is gifted with not a little of the same decorative instinct. Believing in handicraft as the salvation of humanity, and that a man should labor with his hands, he

abandoned the bar, and studied the trade of the binder. Perhaps it is hardly unfair to call him an amateur—so Mr. Hunt was an amateur when he designed those most beautiful wrought-iron gates at Newport. Mr. Cobden-Sanderson's forwarding has not yet attained to the highest professional standard. But there

warder and finisher, unaided even by an apprentice, although his wife (a daughter of Richard Cobden) has taken charge of the sewing. He designs his own tools, having them cut especially for him. Even the letters he uses were drawn for him by Miss May Morris; and he makes a most artful use of lettering, working



"HOPES AND FEARS FOR ART." WILLIAM MORRIS.

Bound by Cobden-Sanderson, London, 1882. Owned by Mr. Brander Matthews.

are not lacking book-lovers who believe him to be the most original and the most effective finisher who has yet appeared in England.

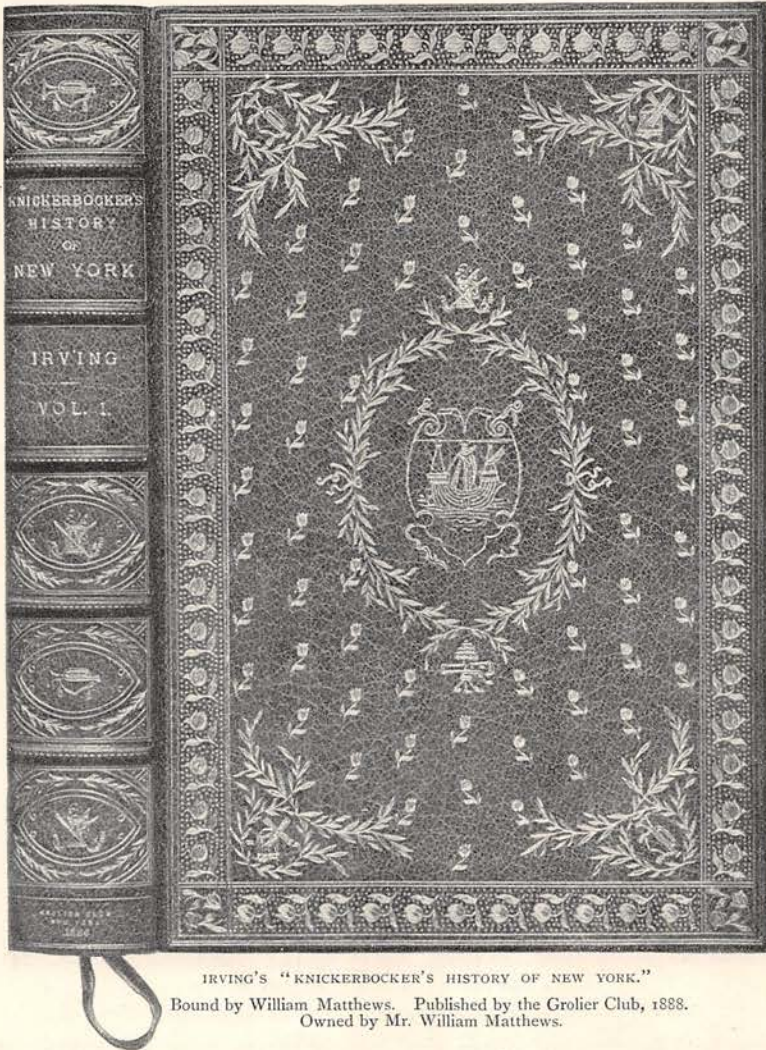
His tooling is admirably firm and dazzlingly vigorous. Whatever the inadequacy of his workmanship in the processes which precede the gilding,—and in these his hand is steadily gaining strength,—there is no disputing his decorative endowment. He brought to the study of book-binding an alert intelligence, a trained mind, and a determination to master the secrets of the art. He does all his own work, being both for-

initials, names, titles, and mottoes into his design, and making them an integral and essential part of the scheme of decoration. He has studied most lovingly the methods of Le Gascon, and he has assimilated some of the taste of that master of the art; it is from Le Gascon, no doubt, that Mr. Cobden-Sanderson caught the knack of powdering parts of his design with gold points, stars, single leaves, and the like—a device giving the utmost brilliancy to the design if used skillfully.

Mr. Cobden-Sanderson will not work to or-

der. He binds only those books that please him, and he binds them as he pleases. He is independent of the caprices of his customers. He does not undertake many volumes, and with each he does his best. When a novice, trying his 'prentice hand, he wasted himself more than once on volumes of no great value, and put a fifty dollar binding on a book not worth five—

tration; as he explained in an article on his art, "beauty is the aim of decoration, and not illustration, or the expression of ideas." So we do not find on his books any of the childish symbolism which has been abundantly advocated in England, and according to which a treatise on zoölogy or botany must be adorned with an animal or a flower—a bald



IRVING'S "KNICKERBOCKER'S HISTORY OF NEW YORK."

Bound by William Matthews. Published by the Grolier Club, 1888.  
Owned by Mr. William Matthews.

a pecuniary solecism, an artistic incongruity. Of late he has not fallen into this blunder, and he prefers to spend himself on books of permanent value in the original edition. Of course he never repeats himself; every one of his bindings is as unique as a picture; there are no replicas. Every cover is composed for the volume itself, and is often the outcome of a loving study of the author, a decorative scheme having been suggested by some representative passage.

But he never confounds decoration with illus-

and babyish labeling of a book wholly unrelated to propriety of ornamentation. Mr. Cobden-Sanderson's covers are generally rich with conventionalized flowers arrayed with geometrical precision. He falls into a naturalistic treatment only at rare and regrettable moments. In a copy of Mr. Morris's "Hopes and Fears for Art," which Mr. Cobden-Sanderson has bound, the design has a careful freedom of composition and an artful symmetry; the treatment of the rose-branches which form the border is almost



purely conventional, and the broad blank space in the center is restfully open.

In America the art of the binder is retarded by reasons really outside of art — by the high wages of skilled workmen, and by the high tariff on raw materials. This is one reason why book-lovers in New York have been wont to send their precious tomes on a long voyage across the Atlantic, to be bound in London or Paris. Americans were among the best cus-

well. Considering the difficulties under which the art has developed in this country, the showing made by the American binders was most creditable.

For a binding like Mr. William Matthews's "Knickerbocker's History of New York," there is no need to make any apology; it is excellent in conception and in execution, pure in style, modestly original, and most harmoniously decorative, with its appropriate ship, its tiny tulips,



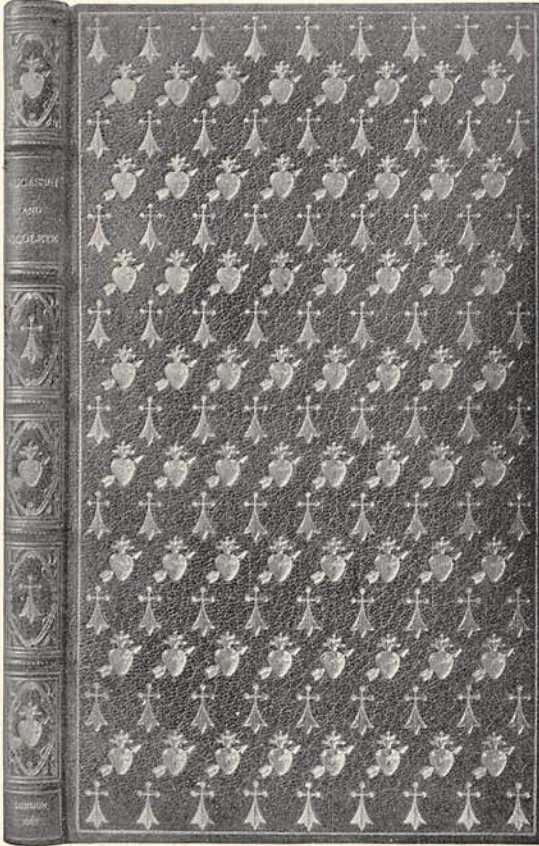
INSIDE COVER OF PRECEDING.

tomers of Francis Bedford, and the catalogue of the Grolier Club exhibition proves that they have been persistent purchasers of the best work of contemporary French binders. But to send books abroad to be bound is no way to encourage the development of the art at home. This same Grolier Club exhibition showed that American craftsmen were capable of turning out work of a very high rank. The best of the books bound by Mr. William Matthews, by Mr. Alfred Matthews, by Bradstreets, by Mr. Smith, and by Mr. Stikeman, held their own fairly

and its wreaths of willow. This is proof, were any needed, of the great advantage there is in having a book bound by a countryman of the author, who will treat it with unconscious propriety of decoration. I know a wise collector in New York who makes it a rule to have his French books bound in Paris, his English books bound in London, and his American books bound here in New York. "Fifty years ago," said Mr. William Matthews in his interesting address on his art, "there was not a finely bound book, except what by chance had been procured

abroad, to be found in any collection in America. Fine binding was an unknown art." Now in the last decade of the nineteenth century, Mr. Matthews thinks "there are many examples of American workmanship in our collections that would do honor to the best French and English binders of the last half-century." If this is

handiwork. Yet Trautz was a German by birth, and earlier in this century there were several German binders established in England—Walther, Kalthoeber, Staggemeier. Even now, while one of the leading binders of London, Mr. Rivière, is of French descent, another, Mr. Zaehnsdorf, is of German. In New York many of the journeyman bookbinders are Germans. Not only was the bibliopegic art of Germany unrepresented at this recent exhibition in New York, but in none of the many recent books about binding, French, English, and American, do I find any attention paid to the work of the modern Germans. Several years ago M. Rouveyre of Paris, who had published half a dozen books about binding, arranged for a French edition of a collection of German bindings and of "La Dorure sur Cuir (Reliure, Ciselure, Gaufrure) en Allemagne." Fifty copies were issued, the same publisher having risked fifteen hundred copies of M. Octave Uzanne's "La Reliure Moderne." From the well-made reproductions in this volume, it is fair to infer that the German binding of to-day is not remarkably interesting. It is sometimes dull and sometimes pretentious; it is frequently designed by architects who are without training in the needs and possibilities of its technic; it is rather violently polychromatic; and it is often set off by elaborate panels of inserted enamel, and by richly chiseled corners and centerpieces of silver. What is best is the artful employment of vigorous blind-tooling; and what is most noteworthy is the successful revival of the medieval art of carving in leather, always best understood by the Germans.



"AUCASSIN AND NICOLETE." LONDON. 1887.

Bound by Ruban. Garnet morocco. Owned by Mr. George B. De Forest.

### III.

true, much of the credit for the improvement of public taste is due to the influence of Mr. Matthews himself.

Of modern Italian and German binding there is no necessity or space to say anything here. The tradition of vellum binding has been kept alive in Rome and in Florence, where the bevel-edged white tomes are often relieved by an inlaid rectangle of colored calf, tooled with what might perhaps be called fairly enough a Neo-Aldine pattern. The exhibition of the Grolier Club, which has aided in the preparation and in the illustration of these pages, included no Italian work, which is evidence that our collectors, rightly or wrongly, do not hold it in high esteem.

Nor was there a single specimen of Teutonic

MUCH as one might expect a precious metal to enrich a tome, there is more than a hint of Teutonic heaviness in most of these carved-leather covers, girt with solid silver clasps, and armed with chased medallions. The occasional attempts of American silversmiths at book-decoration are lighter and more graceful. I have seen more than one prayer-book, the smooth dark calfskin of which was shielded by a thin shell of silver pierced with delicate arabesques. But this is almost an accidental return to a method of ornamentation long past its usefulness, and appropriate only when every book was a portly tome bound in real boards, and reposing in solitary glory on its own lectern. The future of bookbinding does not lie in any alliance with silversmithery.

Just where the future of bookbinding does

lie is very difficult to declare. Cosmopolitan commonplace is the characteristic of much of the work of to-day. Craftsmen of remarkable technical skill are content with conventionality, and they go on indefinitely repeating the old styles,—Maïoli and Grolier, Padeloup and De-rome,—styles which were once alive, but which have long since been void of any germ of vitality. To persist in using them is like refusing to speak any language but Latin. For a man alive to-day a living dialect, however impure, is better than a lifeless language, however perfect. There are not wanting signs of a reaction against the banality of modern bookbinding.

One of them is the instant success of Mr. Cobden-Sanderson's innovations. Another is the return to silver-mounting. Yet a third, curious only, and infertile, is the decoration of a book-cover with enamels, either incrustated or applied. The Germans have taken to letting a monogram, ornamented or metal, into the center of a book-cover; but nothing seems to be gained by this which a mosaic of leather would not have given. The late Philippe Burty, the distinguished French art-critic, and a book-lover with the keenest liking for novelty, had a copy on Dutch paper of Poulet-Malassis's essay on "Ex-Libris"; he enriched it with other interesting book-plates; he inserted a few autograph letters; he had it bound by R. Petit in full morocco, with his monogram at the corners; and in the center of the side he let in a metal plate on which his own book-plate was enameled in niello. This singularly personal binding is reproduced in M. Octave Uzanne's volume on "La Reliure Moderne," where we find another of M. Burty's experiments, a copy of M. Claudius Popelin's "De la Statue et de la Peinture" (translated from Alberti), also bound by Petit, and also identified by the owner's monogram, and having, moreover, in the center of the side, an enameled panel made by M. Popelin himself for his friend's copy of his own book. Burty had in his collections other volumes distinguished by enamels; and there were in the Grolier Club exhibition a set of books belonging to Mr. S. P. Avery, and quite as much out of the common as Burty's. Mr. Avery has sent certain volumes of the "Bibliothèque de l'Enseignement des Beaux-arts" to the authors, asking each to indicate the binding which he thought most consonant with his work; so Mr. Avery has "La Faience," of M. Théodore Deck, decorated with panels of pottery, one of them being a portrait of the author executed at his own ceramic works; and he has Sauzy's "Marvels of Glass-Making," with covers containing glass panels enameled in colors. These ventures belong among the curiosities of the art; they are to be classed among the freaks rather than with the professional beauties.

Another book of Burty's (now owned by Mr. Avery) has an exceptional interest—an interest perhaps rather literary than rigidly artistic. It is a copy of the original edition of Victor Hugo's scorching satire, "Napoleon le Petit," published in 1853, a few months after Napoleon had broken his oath and made himself emperor; this copy (made doubly precious by three lines in the poet's handwriting) was bound in dark green morocco, and the side was hollowed out to receive an embroidered bee—a bee which had been cut from the throne of Napoleon III. in the Tuileries a few days after the battle of Sedan. This is the very irony of bookbinding. A copy of "Les Châtiments" was bound to match. Future collectors will find these bees of Burty even harder to acquire than those which mark the books of De Thou.



INSIDE COVER OF PRECEDING.

Unusual, not to say unique, as such an opportunity must be, there is here a hint for the book-lover not by him to be despised. Here at least is an exceptional binding. Here at least we leave the monotonous iteration of the cut-and-dried. Here is a method of establishing a relation between the subject of the book and

its exterior not hitherto attempted. For nine books out of ten the conventional binding suffices, Jansenist crushed levant for the costly volumes, simple half morocco for those less valuable. But for the special treasures, for the books with an individuality of their own, why may we not abandon this barren impersonality and seek to get out of the regular rut? M. Octave Uzanne avows that he would prefer to have a copy of the "Légende des Siècles" clad soberly in a fragment of the dark-green uniform which Hugo wore the day he was received into the French Academy, to the same volume bound with the utmost luxury by the best binder of the time. Perhaps it is carrying this fancy a little too far to bind the Last Dying Speech and Confession of a murderer in a strip of his own hide properly tanned, or even to cover Holbein's "Dance of Death" with a like ghastly integument; but I confess I should find a particular pleasure in owning the copy of Washington Irving's "Conquest of Grenada," which Mr. Roger de Coverly bound "in Spanish morocco from Valencia" for the Arts and Crafts Exhibition in London in 1889.

In his "Caprices d'un Bibliophile," published in 1878, M. Octave Uzanne urged book-lovers to seek out a greater variety of leathers. The French are not afflicted with what Dickens called "that underdone piecrust cover which is technically known as law-calf," and which is desolately monotonous; nor have they ever cared either for sprinkled calf, as dull and decorous as orthodoxy, or for "tree-marbled calf," much affected by the British. That the French do not take to tree-calf is proof at once of their taste and of their wisdom. Mr. Matthews declares that he does not recommend tree-calf, and M. Marius Michel speaks of the process of marbling it with acids as "a diabolic invention," since it rots the leather—as every one knows who has the misfortune to own books bound in this fashion half a century ago. The French, with a full understanding of the principles of bookbinding, have confined their at-

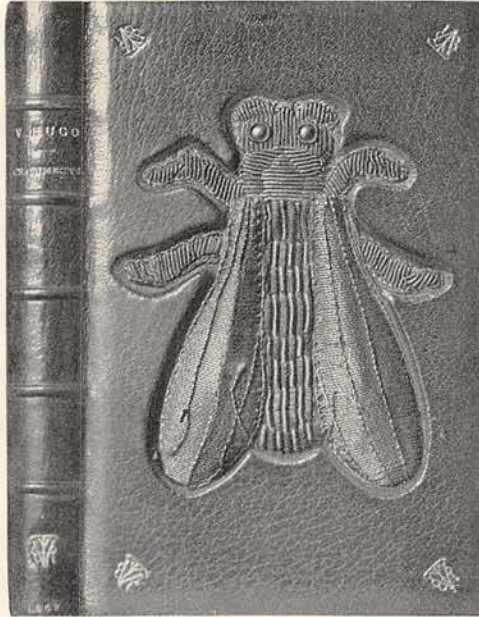
tention almost wholly to calf and to morocco, eschewing even the pleasant-smelling Russia-leather, which becomes brittle, and has a tendency to crack, unless it is constantly handled, whereby it absorbs animal oil from the human fingers.

In the employment of other leathers than calf and morocco we Americans have taken the lead. Books bound in alligator, and in seal-skin, for example, are to be found in any of the leading book-stores, not always appropriately clad, I regret to remark. There is a hideous incongruity, for instance, in sheathing the wisdom of Emerson in alligator-hide, fit as this scaly substance might be for the weird tales

of Poe. Equally horrible is a prayer-book covered with snake-skin; and both of these bibliopégic freaks have been offered to me by tradesmen more enterprising than artistic. Gautier's "Une Nuit de Cléopâtre," that strange tale of the serpent of old Nile, might fitly be protected by the skin of the crocodile, and Captain Bourke's book about the "Snake-Dance of the Moquis of Arizona" seems to call for an ophidian integument. So might we clothe a volume describing a voyage to Alaska in sealskin, or an account of Australia in the hide of the kangaroo. It would be a quaint fancy to put our old favorite

"Rab and his Friends" in dogskin (easily to be had from the glovers), and our new friend "Uncle Remus," in the soft coat of Brer Rabbit. Champfleury's "Les Chats," and M. Anatole France's old-fashioned and cheerful "Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard" could be bound in catskin.

In more than one of the old treatises on book-binding is mention made of an ardent admirer of Charles James Fox, who had the speeches of his idol covered with a vulpine hide—which would serve better, it seems to me, as a coat for a volume of hunting reminiscences. So might the life of Daniel Boone be bound in the skin of a "b'ar" like that which the pioneer killed; and the life of Davy Crockett could be clad in the skin of the coon, a descendant of the fa-



"LES CHÂTIMENTS." VICTOR HUGO, 1853.

Bound by Petit. Green morocco. The "Bee" from the throne of Napoleon III., Tuileries, September, 1870. Owned by Mr. Samuel P. Avery.

bled quadruped which volunteered to come down when he discovered that the backwoodsman had drawn a bead on him. Dana's "Two Years before the Mast" would look well in whale-skin, or, if that were too tough, in shark-skin — shagreen. The "Peau d'âne" of Perault suggests the use of the hide of the animal who once disguised himself in the lion's skin; and for any edition of Æsop's "Fables," an indefinite number of appropriate leathers lies ready to one's hand.

In 1890 Messrs. Tiffany & Co. issued a catalogue of more than a hundred different kinds of leather then on exhibition in their store on Union Square, and ready for use in the making of pocket-books, bags, blotters, card-cases, and the like; and all these are available for the binding of books, if the book-lover will take the trouble to select and to seek for the leather best suited to each tome in its turn. A glance over the list of Messrs. Tiffany & Co. is most suggestive. The skin of the chameleon, for example, how aptly this would bedeck the orations of certain professional politicians! How well the porcupine would suit the later writings of Mr. Ruskin! How fitly the black bear would cover the works of Dr. Johnson, "author of the contradiction," as Hood called him! I have already noted one book best bound in snake-skin, but perhaps the uncanny ophidian had better be reserved for those books which every gentleman's library should be without. Yet I should like to see the speeches of Vallandigham bound in the skin of a copperhead.

M. Uzanne also advocated that the monopoly of leather should be infringed, and that books be bound in stuffs, in velvet now and again, and in old brocades. And what could be more delightfully congenial to Mr. Dobson's "Vignettes in Rhyme," wherein the poet sings of the days when

. . . France's bluest blood  
Danced to the tune of "After us, the flood!"

— what could be more harmonious to his "Proverbs in Porcelain," than to robe those dainty volumes of verse in a remnant of damask or golden brocade saved from the dress of the Pompadour? What could be a fitter apparel for the "Madame Crysanthème" of Pierre Loti than a Japanese silk strangely embroidered, with a label of Japanese leather on the back, and with Japanese water-colors as end-papers?

In M. Uzanne's later volume on "La Reliure Moderne" there are photogravures of books bound in accordance with hints of his — the *cartonnage à la Pompadour* for one. But of all those who were reaching out in new directions with hope of renewing the art of the bookbinder, Philippe Burty seemed to me to have been the most fertile. One of his tentatives was a bold

and frequent use of his own monogram in the decoration of his books; especially noteworthy was the skilful employment of this monogram in the *dentelle*, or border of the inside, oftener than not disfigured in America and in England by a hackneyed roulette, blurring brutally at the corners. In the bindings of Henry II. and Diana of Poitiers we can see the most admirable utilization of a monogram and a device; and here is a model modern book-decorators may follow from afar as best they can. So, too, Longepierre made use of the emblem of the Golden Fleece, for which to-day bibliopegic argonauts voyage in vain. In the cutting of special tools, monograms, devices, significant emblems, — masks, lyres, torches, or tears, — each owned by the individual book-owner, there is perhaps hope of some relief from the stereotyped insipidity of the ordinary binder's stock in trade.

It is very difficult to indicate the probable line of bibliopegic development. Only after many a vain effort and many a doubtful struggle do we ever attain the goal of our desires. Setting our faces to the future, we must let the dead past bury its dead, and we must give up the lifeless imitation of defunct styles. Greater variety is needed, greater freedom also, such as some of the other decorative arts have achieved of late years. The duty of the book-lover is equal to that of the bookbinder; they must needs work together for the advance of the art. For their collaboration to be pregnant the book-lover must educate himself in the possibilities and in the technical limitations of the art. Every architect will confess that he has had many a practical suggestion from his clients, and more often from the wives of his clients; and the influence of the book-lover on the bookbinder can be even more beneficial.

In dealing with the ordinary uninspired workman, perhaps the less said the better, and the simpler the work intrusted to him the more satisfactory it is likely to be. Here, perhaps, the most that can be done is to follow the fashion and prescribe the style. With an intelligent binder, fond of his art, and not afraid of a step aside from the beaten path, the book-lover can do much, encouraging his ally, lending him boldness, keeping him up to the mark, sustaining him to do his best, showing him the most interesting work that has been done elsewhere. The relation of the patron — offensive vocable — to the decorative artist is not unlike that of the stage-manager to the actor, Samson to Rachel, for instance, M. Sardou to Mme. Sarah Bernhardt; he can show what he wants done, even though he cannot do it himself. This is what Grolier did, and De Thou, and M. Burty. Thus the bookbinder and the book-lover fare forward together, making interesting experi-

ments, whereby the art progresses, even though the most of the experiments fail.

That the book-lover and the bookbinder can put their heads together, it is needful that the latter should be an individual and not a factory. There must be binderies for the commercial work (of which I hope to be able to speak in another paper), for "edition binding," as it is called; but "extra binding," the covering of a single volume in accord with the wishes of the owner of that one book can best be done where the artist-artisan is at liberty to meet his customer face to face, that they may talk the matter over. Most binderies are little more than factories, with many machines, and a close division of labor, and a foreman who lays out the work of the "hands." This is not the way Mr. Cobden-Sanderson is able to delight us with his lovely design, nor is it the way Trautz carried on his business. An artist as independent as Mr. Cobden-Sanderson, and as rigid in his independence, is best apart; he broods in solitude, and we profit by his dream. Trautz had three assistants at the most; he was his own forwarder and his own finisher: and the patron

had no difficulty in dealing directly with the man who was to do the work. Not only is this relation vital to the progress of the art, but the factory system is fatal to it, when the capitalist at the head of the bindery is willing selfishly to take the credit of all that is done in his shop. For a competent designer, with the proper pride of an artist, so suppressed a position is intolerable. If the forwarding and the finishing of a book are by different hands, the owner of the book ought to know it, and the two men who coöperate ought to know that he knows it. Perhaps what the art of bookbinding is most in need of just now is the establishment of the individual binder, an artisan-artist in a shop of his own with an immediate assistant or two, and maybe a pair of apprentices. Then the binder will sign the work he does, and the work will bear the name of the man who really did it and no other. The superiority of American wood-engraving over the British is due partly at least to the fact that in the United States the engraver is one individual artist, while in Great Britain he is either a shop-keeper or a factory hand.

*Brander Matthews.*

## THE MAGIC EGG.



HE pretty little theater attached to the building of the Unicorn Club had been hired for a certain January afternoon by Mr. Herbert Loring, who wished to give therein a somewhat novel performance to which he had invited a small audience consisting entirely of friends and acquaintances.

Loring was a handsome fellow about thirty years old, who had traveled far and studied much. He had recently made a long sojourn in the far East, and his friends had been invited to the theater to see some of the wonderful things he had brought from that country of wonders. As Loring was a clubman, and belonged to a family of good social standing, his circle of acquaintances was large, and in this circle a good many unpleasant remarks had been made regarding the proposed entertainment—made of course by the people who had not been invited to be present. Some of the gossip on the subject had reached Loring, who did not hesitate to say that he could not talk to a crowd, and that he did not care to show the curious things he had collected to people who would not thoroughly appreciate them. He had been very particular in regard to his invitations.

At three o'clock on the appointed afternoon

nearly all the people who had been invited to the Unicorn theater were in their seats. No one had stayed away except for some very good reason, for it was well known that if Herbert Loring offered to show anything it was worth seeing.

About forty people were present, who sat talking to one another, or admiring the decoration of the theater. As Loring stood upon the stage,—where he was entirely alone, his exhibition requiring no assistants,—he gazed through a loophole in the curtain upon a very interesting array of faces. There were the faces of many men and women of society, of students, of workers in various fields of thought, and even of idlers in all fields of thought, but there was not one which indicated a frivolous or listless disposition. The owners of those faces had come to see something, and they wished to see it.

For a quarter of an hour after the time announced for the opening of the exhibition Loring peered through the hole in the curtain, and then, although all the people he had expected had not arrived, he felt it would not do for him to wait any longer. The audience was composed of well-bred and courteous men and women, but despite their polite self-restraint Loring could see that some of them were getting tired of waiting. So, very reluctantly, and feel-