Ornamental Leather Bindings of the Fifteenth Century.

The practice of decorating leather by the embossing and gaufering process, or stamping, was brought to an artistic pitch during the fifteenth century, and at this and later periods was not only used for book covers, but also in adorning the interior of houses, as carpets, hangings, and furniture covers. "Leathers for laying down in the rooms in summer time" are mentioned in the inventories of the Duke of Burgundy, and in 1416 Isabeau of Bavaria and the Duke of Berry sent for leather carpets and hangings to Cordova. In the old records are specified the various ways in which leather was ornamented. The foremost among them is *cuir bouilli*, done in the style of embossed work—that is, cut with the knife and raised in a relief. Then followed the punched *cuir bouilli*—that is, worked with the stamp or ornamental die used in the cold state, "*au petit fer.*" According to M. de Laborde, the first process dates from the ninth, the second from the fourteenth century. From this to the regular stamped or hammered leather of the bookbinders the transition was easy, and the latter application soon acquired such importance that its richness rivalled goldsmiths' work. The most ancient leather work of this kind, as already stated, came from Cordova, but was soon imitated in Venice and Flanders. Later on, Paris, Lyons, Carpentras, and Avignon, Augsburg, Nuremberg, and several Italian towns produced ornamental leather work, stamped in relief by means of a wooden matrix or mould, pressed firmly on the leather while softened by heat. These reliefs, consisting of arabesques, foliage, branches, flowers, birds, &c., followed the changes of style peculiar to each epoch. How long the fashion for these costly and sumptuous leathers was continued is not easy to say. Attempts were early made to replace them by figured and printed velvets and damasks, until the idea of imitating the leather and silk hangings by a process of printing upon paper, which took first and practical shape in England in the seventeenth century.