There is no more interesting instance of amateur bookbinding on record than that of the work done by the inmates of Nicholas Ferrar's House of Charity at Little Gidding, in Huntingdonshire, in the early part of the 17th century. This curiously many-sided institution, at once convent, college, hospital, and house of industry—certainly a unique establishment in its way—owed its existence entirely to the unaided exertions of its founder, a man of singular force as well as versatility of character.

He was born in London, in 1592, and educated at Enborne, in Berkshire, and at Clare Hall, Cambridge, where he greatly distinguished himself, graduating as a Master of Arts at the unusually early age of twenty-one. He at that time evidently had no intention of entering the Church, but immediately on leaving the University started for a tour on the Continent, in 1613, for the benefit of his health, which was then delicate. After four years spent in travelling through Germany, Italy, and Spain (he seems to have avoided France), he returned to London, in 1618, and succeeded his elder brother, John, in the office of King's Counsel for the Colony of Virginia, and eventually obtained a seat in Parliament. This, however, was not a life which had any attractions for him, and not long after, in 1624, wearying of Court and political life, he formed a solemn resolve to withdraw from the busy world, and seek refuge and peace in religious retirement.

Having persuaded his mother, by that time a widow, to join him, he purchased the old manor house and estate of Little Gidding, which appeared to exactly suit his purpose. He at once set to work to repair the building, which had fallen into decay, and to restore the adjoining Chapel, and fit it for proper use. As soon as he had completed all these arrangements, Ferrar sent for his sister and her husband, John Collet, and their large family of eight sons and eight daughters, to come and take up their abode with him, and assist him in carrying on his projected works of mercy. This was in 1625; in the following year Ferrar entered into holy orders, and was ordained by the celebrated Dr. Laud, then Bishop of St. David's.

Henceforth, the strict routine of daily labour and worship followed by the little community, and the mingled purity, simplicity, and charity of their life, form an unrivalled
picture of the beauty of domestic holiness. It was doubtless this unique character of the institution which led the author of John Inglesant to introduce it into that very remarkable work, where it becomes the subject of a charming description.

One among many other forms of employment adopted at Little Gidding was Book-binding. To quote from Dr. Peckard’s Life of Nicholas Ferrar: “Amongst other articles of instruction and amusement, Mr. Ferrar entertained an ingenious bookbinder, who taught the family, females as well as males, the whole art and skill of bookbinding, gilding, lettering, and, what they call ‘pasting-printing,’ by the use of the rolling-press. By this assistance he composed a full Harmony or Concordance of the four Evangelists, adorned with many beautiful pictures, which required more than a year for the composition, and was divided into 150 heads or chapters. For this purpose he set apart a handsome room near the oratory.” This Harmony, a kind of chronological digest of the Gospels, was manufactured by the primitive and naive method of scissors and paste, the printed matter being cut out from books and pasted on large sheets of paper. It is evident that several copies must have been made, for it is certain that George Herbert possessed one, and further, that the king, Charles I., hearing of this, requested that he might have one like it; this is now in the British Museum, and is lettered Harmony of the Four Evangelists. It is a large folio bound by Mary Collet, in 1635, in brown morocco: in the middle of the side is a small circle containing the monogram I.H.S., and around it is much ornament, which, we are sorry to say, is not of an artistic character. The ladies of Little Gidding were evidently not very learned in the principles of decorative art. At the same time the King ordered a similar compendium of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel, of which there is a copy in the British Museum, lettered The History of the Israelites, but as this is bound in greenish-brown morocco, and the King’s book was described as covered in gold-embroidered velvet, it is doubtful whether the latter was not a mere outer case only: the Museum copy may be a duplicate, but as it bears the royal cipher, C.R., the first theory seems the more plausible.

A recent writer in Macmillan’s Magazine asserts that the skill and exactitude with which the cuttings are fitted and joined together are so exquisite, that it is extremely difficult to detect the least sign of the patchwork nature of their composition. The workers at Little Gidding usually produced velvet or silk rather than leather bindings, principally, perhaps, because the majority of the “hands” were those of women—a fact which gave rise to the misleading designation of “The Protestant Nunnery”—to whom work in a textile fabric would naturally come more easily than in the more stubborn material. In the Exhibition of Ancient and Modern Bookbindings at the Liverpool Art Club, in November, 1882, a volume was shown which was thus described in the catalogue: “Tentations, their Nature, Danger, and Cure, by R. Capel, London, 1636, 12° Sides and back embroidered in silk, in a varied coloured latticed pattern, by the Nuns of Little Gidding, bordered in silver thread.” The book was the property of Mr. John Newton, a surgeon of Liverpool, and a well-known collector of books and bindings. And at the sale of Lord Crawford’s library, last Spring, a small English Bible of 1650 claimed attention on account of its richly embroidered cover, executed by the ladies known as “The Nuns of Little Gidding.” The design on the cover, which is similar on both sides, represents a vase of flowers, embroidered in relief with silver threads on black silk, the flowers being of coloured silks. (This little book was sold for £17 15s.) A description of the extant copies of the Harmonies preserved in the British
Museum, and in the Library of St. John's College, Oxford, will be found in *Two Lives of Nicholas Ferrar*, admirably edited by the Rev. (now Professor) J. E. B. Mayor, Cambridge, 1855. There is likewise at the British Museum an *Acts of the Apostles* similarly bound in morocco, evidently the work of the Little Gidding household; the side of the book is ornamented with a kind of diamond-shaped lattice work.

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**Dr. Dibdin on Bookbinding.**

The following account of Binding and Binders in Paris, written by the celebrated Thomas Frognall Dibdin, at the beginning of the century, may interest our readers:

"What then remains in the books very worthy of especial notice?—Bookbinding—Yes! Some few hours of my residence in this metropolis have been devoted to an examination of this seductive branch of book commerce. And yet I have not seen, nor am I likely to see, one single binder, either Thouvenin, or Simier, or Braidel, or Lesné. I am not sure whether Courteval or either of the Bozérians be living; but their handy works live and are lauded in every quarter of Paris. A preliminary observation or two may be forgiven me. "The decline and fall" of empires is a theme sufficiently notorious to us from early youth; but the decline and fall of bookbinding at Paris is a theme which perhaps may not be of quite such familiar occurrence, even to the most celebrated of our own collectors. Nevertheless, so it is. There has been a great "decline" of the Biblioplastic Art among the Parisians, but the present bookbinders indulge a hope, and even promulgate about that there will be no absolute "fall" or helpless prostration of that same art. They are right in so doing, nor with a little care and a less indulgence of national vanity need they look forward to such a decay. Formerly the French eclipsed all the world in bookbinding; the copies in the Préfond, De Boze, Gaignat, and even De la Valliere collections confirm this observation. Our Johnnies, Montagues, and Baumgartens are not to be mentioned in the same breath with their Desseuil, Padeloup, Delorme and Derôme, as to taste in finishing in the ornaments. And if you choose to carry the history of the art three centuries back, who have we to put in competition with Gascon—the supposed binder of Grolier’s books—and even, perhaps some of those of Henri II. and Diane de Poictiers? The restorer of the Fathers (if you prefer this latter appellative) of modern bookbinding in France, was the elder Bozérien, of whose productions the book amateurs of Paris are enthusiastically fond. Lord Spencer possesses, in the Latin Polybius of 1473, one of the most splendid specimens of the tools of Bozérien; but I verily believe that the same distinguished collector would cheerfully part with the copy, if he could obtain another equally large and in equally good condition, but bound in the more correct taste of the English school. Bozérien undoubtedly had his merits, but he was fond of gilt tooling to excess. His ornaments are too minute and too profuse; and moreover, occasionally, very unskilfully worked. His choice of morocco is not always to my taste, while his joints are neither carefully measured nor do they play easily;"

* Reprinted from an exceedingly scarce "Bibliographical and Picturesque Tour in France and Germany," by Dr. DIBDIN, published in 1821.