Practical dyers of finely-grained leather claim that the skin texture is so peculiar that it will not stand treatment with alcoholic solutions, and that, therefore, the aqueous dyes are preferable. If alcoholic solutions must necessarily be used, they ought always to be diluted to the verge of precipitation. There are, in fact, some technical points on leather colouring of which it is desirable that job bookbinders should be informed, because, infrequent as the opportunities may be to put such knowledge to a test, when an occasion accidentally presents itself in some sudden emergency or dilemma, the information now given will be likely to prove of great advantage.

To obtain any quantity of selected morocco without abrasions or visible defacements, which are more or less perplexing to the binder, is conceded in the trade to be impossible. Even the operation of tawing the close yet marvellously flexible goatskin does not rid it of the scars and blemishes incidental to the rough skurrying of the hardy animal from which it has been stripped. On the contrary, that softening process is apt to develop the flaws and cause them to become annoyingly perceptible at the finishing stage.

Expert dyeing of the skin may partly, but will not wholly, remedy these abrasions. They lurk in a concealment whose insufficiency is apparent the moment that a costly full or half binding is subjected to leather expansion from cold or to shrivelling from heat. The skilled craftsman must not be blamed needlessly for defects which he is quite unable to control.

Mechanical pressure, intelligently applied as to its surface distribution, may in time reshape or reset a warped book. To restore the discoloured or faded leather casing of that book to its pristine hue is, however, generally regarded as a hopeless task. That success which results from a “try again” doggedness is the more substantial when it creates an exception disproving the hitherto accepted rule.

It is known there is a natural and very strong tendency in supple leather to fix aniline colours without the aid of mordants; hence, those dyes are particularly available for the finer qualities of dressed skins. In the initial preparation of book leathers, after soaking, scraping, liming and hair peeling, they are plunged into a barrel containing alum, salt, and yolk of eggs. The receptacle is for a while swiftly rotated until the skins are in a proper state to admit of colouring.

Now begins the more difficult process. Good book leather must not only be pliable, closely textured, and of fine and even grain, but capable of setting almost any tint which might enhance its value in the eyes of the critic, increase its specific usefulness, and add to the beauty of its outward dressing.

Acid colours are more important than the basic. Whatever dyes do not uniformly set on the whitened surface of the leather must be mordanted. In most cases tints are best applied with a brush. Of the saline mordants the most essential are the varied soaps. A pure, hard soda soap should be given preference.

Subsequent to painting the skin it is rinsed with cold water while yet upon the colourer’s table. Then it is thoroughly stretched, so that all its pores may be susceptible to the dye. Another application of the colour is made; again the skin is washed off, sickered and rubbed until the water runs clean from its surface and the tint appears to be evenly set.

All colours which require deepening or darkening are skilfully brushed over with a solution of Salzburg vitriol, chemically known as ferrous-cupric sulphate, about twenty-five grams of which are dissolved in three litres of water. Afterwards the leather is finally washed in clean water and dried for packing.

The subjoined formulæ or recipes are condensed from an authority of high repute. Each is reprinted with a view to inform non-professional leather maltings how they may at a pinch repair a damaged book cover. They are explicitly cautioned to try and set the colour first on a waste strip of vellum or white kid.

To obtain dark brown, eight parts of fustic, one part of logwood, two parts of Brazil wood, and one part of red sanders are boiled in soft water for an hour and then strained through cambric or a fine linen towel. The vitriol treatment deepens the shade. This is, of course, omitted for light brown, and the skin is primed with dilute potash.

For chocolate brown, one and a half parts of Brazil wood are boiled with forty-five parts of water for about two hours. A little iron acetate is added, proportioned to the tone desired. Chestnut brown is more difficult to obtain. The moistened leather is primed with a solution of one kilogram of copper acetate in fifty litres of water, then sickered out and painted with a solution of yellow prussiate of potash in weak acetic acid.

A decoction of half a kilogram of cutch, sixty grams of copper sulphate and forty litres of water applied upon a feeble priming, develops a uniform and acceptable brown; while two parts of Hungarian fustic, one part of quercitrin and a quarter part of logwood well boiled, if applied upon a strong priming of potash, and followed with the vitriol treatment, results in a beautiful olive brown.

Ordinary red is secured from a decoction of sanderswood used upon a weak priming of alum free from iron. Cochineal in a linen bag boiled with water containing two per cent. of aqua ammonia will produce a good even red. Alizarin red, a delicate flesh tint, is obtained by brushing the leather with a solution of alizarin in dilute soda and then rinsing with soap water. Zaffer extract, diluted with sixty parts of water containing one part of tartar, is painted on a weak priming of annatto, resulting in a vivid scarlet.

For orange a red priming is given by Brazil wood, and fustic is applied to impart the yellow tinge. Seventy-five parts of the former to twenty-five of the latter produce a red orange, equal parts an ordinary orange, and twenty-five of Brazil wood to seventy-five of fustic develops a brilliant yellow orange. One kilogram of barberry root in thirty of water with two hundred grams of alum, free of iron, makes a definite
yellow. For lemon yellow, one part of turmeric is digested for twenty-four hours in four parts of alcohol, diluted with water, and applied upon a feeble potash ground. The dye for chrome yellow is first applied with a solution of thirty grams of red chromate of potash in a half litre of water, and fixed by thirty grams acetate of lead in another half litre of water.

The blues, purples, and violets develop from combinations, reductions and tonings familiar to all colourists of fancy leathers.

A light olive green is obtained as follows:—A decoction of one kilogram of fustic, a quarter kilogram archil, and twenty litres of water is painted on a light base of Prussian blue.

For picric green, an aqueous solution of picric acid is substituted for the fustic and archil.

Dark green is obtained from four parts of quercitron and one part of logwood upon a strong priming of vitriol.—American Bookmaker.

Artistic Types.

The art editor of the Spectator, Mr. D. S. McColl, makes some interesting remarks on the Kelmscott types, apropos of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition. The latest results of Mr. Morris's activity, he says, are seen in specimens of tapestry and of printing. In the tapestries there is evident an affectionate study of the work of the best period, and this is combined with the romantic sentiments of the painters already referred to; but the affection and intelligence that have brought these elements together stop short at that point. The adaptation is imperfect; the colours that have a suspicion of harshness in the Flemish work have become a clear discord; the continuity of the decoration is lost by a defect of tone that detaches the figures too much from the ground; the flowers do not fall into their subordinate place, but assert themselves like single specimens at a show; and an elaboration of modelling is employed in the faces and limbs that would demand a greater knowledge of drawing.

Still, Mr. Morris has carried through the revival of a difficult art, and laid a stepping-stone by which some one ought to profit.

The printing comes nearer success than the tapestry; though here, again, we have rather an intelligent experiment by a lover of beautiful books than a convincing work of talent. To judge fairly, different qualities of a printed book would have to be considered, of which the printing itself, with the colour of the ink and paper, would be one; a second, the design of the page, with the disposition of the text and illustrations; and a third, the character of the type itself. On the first score, these books of the Kelmscott Press deserve great praise. The effect of colour in the printing page is extremely pleasant, especially where the grey produced by the fine lines of a woodcut are combined with the strong blacks and reds of the type. Then, again, the effect of that close and solid texture of type at which Mr. Morris aims is very handsome. But under this head there is a balance of advantage and disadvantage to be considered. What Mr. Morris’s page gains in solidity as a thing printed, it loses in lucidity as a thing read, and it is perhaps a more important quality of design in print to model to the eye as closely as possible the form of the discourse by the device of paragraphs than to preserve the text from those breaks of white which are accidental if their logical cause is not considered. The bother, of course, is that the symbols of sound in print do not give an exact space equivalent to the time occupied in making the sounds; hence the lines of a verse which are musically equivalent come out in print with a ragged difference of length. There is, however, no way of getting over this except by some form of manuscript; and to take the bull by the horns, as Mr. Morris does in one instance, and run the lines of verse on in prose form, is to lose the greater advantage to the eye of grasping the musical structure of the verse. It is one of those irreducible elements that the printer must give up struggling with, because the general law of order and clearness requires that the arranger of the words as black and white should give way here to the arranger of the words as symbols.

The same law of clearness has pronounced finally against black-letter type, and its revival can never be more than a curiosity of taste. Mr. Morris’s experiment in Roman type is more interesting. The man who could design a perfectly satisfactory font of Roman type would be indeed a great designer, because the difference between the nearly good and the first-rate depends on variations so subtle; and the room for variation, so infinite in subtlety, is within very strict and narrow limits of range this way and that. The main forms have been long ago determined, and the designers who have given loose to their personal caprices in the fancy fonts that every printer possesses and lavishly uses when he gets the chance, have only exhibited their own vulgarity and inability to recognise what has been done once for all.

And yet there is no existing font which can be called quite satisfactory; in each there linger one or two eccentricities, or else by some hairbreadth in thickness, or some almost inappreciable want of refinement in curvature, the absolutely right form is missed. Now Mr. Morris has, of course, gone to good models,—probably to one of the early Venetian typefounders, who modelled their types on a beautiful form of manuscript lettering; but if his “golden type” be compared with those, says, of Nicholas Jenson and Johannes de Spira, it will be found to miss just the last refinements on which the excellence of type depends. It would take too long to criticise the letters individually, but the individual defects tell at a glance when the type is looked at in masses. In the matter of illustrations, Mr. Morris is not satisfied with the artless way in which the ordinary publisher dots his text with woodcuts, and he very properly attempts to bind up text and illustration in one scheme. This is partly effected by the use of rich borders, more rich often than coherent. For coherence, indeed, the best work Mr. Morris sends to the exhibition is a large carpet, and, in spite of the interest of his other experiments, it were to be wished that he would limit himself more to a branch of art in which excellence is within his grasp.